

How far can you reduce sugar in a pavlova?

Surprisingly low

By Melissa D'arabian

Pavlovas are dreamy. For the uninitiated, a pavlova (named after the famed ballerina's fluffy tutu) is essentially a meringue shell baked at low heat until the outside is barely golden crisp, but the inside remains soft and billowy, like a creamy marshmallow. The shell then is typically filled with whipped cream, custard, or fruit compote.

And, as mentioned, the result is a dream-come-true. Pavlovas are a splendid choice for entertaining, because contrary to what we

might think of a delicate meringue, these guys are pretty hardy, and you can make them a day or two in advance no problem. Just be sure to keep them in an airtight container so that they don't absorb ambient air moisture and lose their delightful crisp texture, and top just before serving.

As you probably know, meringues are primarily two ingredients: egg whites and sugar. In this the good cop/bad cop pairing, sugar is definitely the bad cop, while egg whites are considered downright health food by many folks who look like they know what they are

talking about at the gym. (They aren't wrong, by the way, one egg white has 5 grams of protein, at only 25 calories and no fat.) The sugar is what gives the pavlovas their luscious interior. So I wondered: Just how low I could go on the sugar without ruining the texture and creating just a weird protein puff that only my gym-friends would want to eat?

The answer: surprisingly quite low. A typical pavlova recipe might have a ratio of 1/4 cup of sugar per egg white in the recipe. I found that I could cut the sugar in half with no noticeable impact on texture and taste. So I kept testing

and reducing the sugar. And the very lowest that yielded a reasonable result was a ratio of 2 teaspoons of sugar per egg white, or one-eighth the typical amount of sugar.

At that level of sugar, the pavlova becomes less flowy, and more airy and crisp, almost styrofoam-y. Two of my kids actually preferred this version! Most of us felt like a little extra sugar was worth the nutritional profile impact, and so I'll share that version - with 4 teaspoons of sugar per egg white, or 1/4 cup sugar to 3 egg whites as the recipe is written. Still, a dessert victory if you ask me.



TANGY RASPBERRY PAVLOVA WITH BALSAMIC GLAZE

Ingredients

Start to finish: 90 minutes, including inactive time
 Servings: 8
 3 egg whites
 1/4 cup sugar
 1/2 teaspoon white vinegar
 1 teaspoon corn starch
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 1/4 teaspoon almond extract (optional)

Topping

1 cup light sour cream
 2 tablespoons maple syrup
 1 cup raspberries (or other fruit)
 1-2 tablespoons balsamic glaze (reduced balsamic vinegar) for drizzling
 fresh mint leaves, chopped, for garnish (optional)

Preparation

Preheat oven to 275 F. In a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, beat eggs on medium speed until foamy, about 1 minutes. Add the sugar and continue to beat on medium high speed until stiff peaks form. Add the vinegar, corn starch and extracts and beat on low until well mixed. (You can use a hand mixer, but times may be a little longer.)

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Spoon the meringue into 8 even, round piles. Use the back of a tablespoon to spread the meringue into circles about 1/2-inch tall, and approximately

3-inches wide. Use the spoon to create a gentle depression in the center of the meringue. Bake for 20 minutes.

Keeping the oven door closed, turn off the heat but leave the pavlovas in the oven for another hour. Remove the pavlovas from the oven and allow to cool completely. Stir the light sour cream and maple syrup together in a small bowl. Remove from the parchment paper gently. Place the pavlova on a plate and spoon 2 tablespoons of the cream into the center. Top with berries and a drizzle of balsamic glaze. Top with a sprinkle of mint leaves, if desired. — AP