

Mini-muffins

are great snacks or breakfast

By Melissa D'Arabian

The reason cupcakes took the baking world by storm a few years ago is because, in short, they are awesome. A sweet little package of moist, crumbly goodness topped with a dollop of creamy, fatty frosting - I understand my four daughter's (and America's) obsession.

For the healthy eater, cupcakes might seem like a non-starter; completely off the table. Except, my 10-year-old daughter, Charlotte, did something very wise that changed everything for me last year. At someone else's party, she chose a mini-cupcake over a regular-sized cupcake, which frankly

puzzled me, given the "more-is-more" tendency normally driving my children's sugary-treat decisions. Her reason? Because it was "cuter." To her, tiny was darling, and that made it better. I could use that to my advantage, I decided. And so can you.

I have always loved the automatic portion control that comes with using a regular muffin tin - I bake up everything from scalloped potatoes to huevos rancheros muffin-sized. And mini-muffins are perfect for healthier muffin batters - the smaller size is more forgiving on the texture front, so you can load up batters with protein and fiber (think whole grain flours, nuts, seeds, shredded veggies) and they will still be tasty, where full-sized muffins can feel denser more easily.

I make all sorts of flavors of mini-muffins, and keep them in my freezer in resealable plastic bags for last minute snacks and even breakfast on the go - they thaw in minutes on the counter. Using my carrot and (leftover, repurposed) quinoa mini-muffin as a base, I added a reduced sugar frosting out of cream cheese and orange juice, and voila: the mini-muffin became a "cupcake." Suddenly, I had very reasonable dessert! And, if you want to skip the frosting altogether, then keep this little guy as a mini-muffin, no problem - they are a treat either way.

MINI QUINOA
CARROT CAKES**Ingredients**

Start to finish: 30 minutes, plus cooling time

Servings: 20 mini cupcakes

1 1/4 cups finely-milled almond flour

1/2 cup cooked quinoa

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon ground pumpkin pie spice (or ground cinnamon)

1/4 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons coconut oil, melted

2 eggs

1/4 cup sugar (agave or maple syrup could also be used)

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1/4 teaspoon almond extract

1 tablespoon fresh orange juice (or other citrus)

1 large banana, mashed well until creamy (about 1/2 cup)

1/3 cup finely-grated carrot (about one carrot), gently squeezed dry in a paper towel

Cream Cheese Frosting (optional):

4 ounces (1/2 cup) light cream cheese

1/4 cup powdered sugar

1-2 tablespoons fresh orange juice (or other citrus)

Orange zest, for garnish, optional

Preparation

Preheat oven to 350 F. In a large bowl, whisk together the almond flour, quinoa, baking powder, baking soda, pumpkin pie spice, and salt and set aside. In a small bowl, vigorously whisk the oil, sugar, eggs, vanilla extract, almond extract and orange juice until pale and creamy (about 2 minutes). Mix wet ingredients into dry ingredients and stir with a wooden spoon until blended. Add the banana and carrot and mix well.

Spoon into mini-muffin tin lined with paper liners (or sprayed well with nonstick spray). Fill about 2/3 full. Bake until cooked through, about 15 minutes. Meanwhile make the frosting by whisking together the cream cheese, powdered sugar and lemon juice until completely smooth. Cool cupcakes completely, and frost if desired.