



Grains of truth about FLAT BREADS

Definitions

Among the many variations of bread products, flat breads have become increasingly popular. Most Americans are familiar with pita, pizza and focaccia. These are just a small sample of flat breads, an ancient form dating back to the first bread baked by man. Today more than 1.8 billion people worldwide eat traditional flat bread. The appeal of these breads lies in their many styles and shapes, as well as the ethnic flavors that can be applied.

Flat breads are divided into two major groups: single-layered and double layered. Double-layered flat breads are leavened with yeast. Single-layered flat breads are made as both leavened and unleavened breads. They can be round and oblong, smooth or lumpy, plain or seasoned. They can be used for scooping, dipping or wrapping around a variety of fillings.

History

People have been making flat breads for well over 6,000 years. The oldest baker's oven in the world was known in Babylon in 4000 B.C. Flat bread was baked in hot ashes or on heated stone slabs in the old kingdom of Egypt as long ago as 2500 B.C.

The theory behind these breads was that when eaten with a beverage, the bread would expand in your stomach, making you feel full.

Bread-making skills, including fermentation, passed from the Egyptians to the Greeks and Romans. Bread was important in Roman culture and religion, therefore, large commercial bakeries were developed in the second century B.C. to meet the demands of increasing bread consumption.

According to Scandinavian tradition, flat breads were made in large batches and sometimes formed into flat rounds with holes in the center. The breads were then strung together and stored hanging. This ensured a "bread" product through lean months and tough weather.

Availability

The magic of flat breads lies in their versatility. Most were designed either to hold other foods or to serve as eating utensils. Today, "fusion" cuisine in North America has made ethnic foods, and the cultural habits that accompany them, part of the new "High Fashion."

Fortunately, most bakeries, supermarkets, ethnic grocers and specialty food stores carry various flat breads—such as pita, tortilla, focaccia, lavash, ciabatta and matzoh. Check in your grocers' freezer section or in the bread aisle. They are also widely available in restaurants. If you survey the menu, chances are you will find one or more of them listed. Sit back and take pleasure in the new world of flat breads.

Storage

Flat breads can be stored in several ways:
Room temperature: 5 days; Refrigerated: 25 days;
Frozen: 6 months - Quality is not compromised when frozen. Thaw at room temperature.

Nutritional value

Because the variety of flat breads vary in ingredients, it is important to read the labels for their nutritional contents.



Characteristics

Here is a list of a few flat breads, and the similarities and differences between them. (can be whole wheat or enriched white)

Chapatti: The subcontinent of Asia has a huge variety of unleavened flatbreads, using a wide selection of grains. Chapatti is among the most popular. A tortilla look-a-like, although darker in color, it is common in northern India, made from whole-wheat flour and cooked on a tava, which resembles a griddle.

Ciabatta: This short, stubby, slipper-shaped bread from Lake Como region in Italy is much lighter than its shape would suggest. The porous, chewy interior is enclosed in a crunchy, crispy crust that is lightly coated with flour.

Focaccia: Is crusty, chewy, moist and usually dimpled bread. It is often brushed with olive oil, sprinkled with favorite herbs and toppings and baked in the oven like a pizza.

Fry Bread: Literally fried bread, cooked on the stovetop and a staple for many American Indians. This flatbread is great with any of your favorite sweet toppings such as honey, powdered sugar or jam.

Gyro Bread: Authentic Greek pita bread. Ideal for use as traditional souvlaki and gyros.

Lavash: This soft and pliable flat bread is perfect for "wrap" sandwiches and roll-ups. When dried, it becomes a crispy "cracker bread", great for melted cheese.

Matzoh: The ritual Jewish unleavened flat bread is eaten at Passover to remind the Jews that when their ancestors fled Egypt in the Exodus, they were in such haste, they had no time to let bread rise. Matzoh is called the "bread of affliction," but it also celebrates a joyful holiday.

Pizza Crust: Hand stretched dough--just add sauce, cheese and your favorite toppings.

Pocket Pita: The bread with a pocket. Ideal for stuffing with your favorite sandwich fixings; as well as salad combinations.

Tandoori Naan: Prepared in the traditional 'tandoori' oval shape, just like the ones made in ancient 'tandoori' ovens. This flatbread is featured in many Indian, Pakistan and Pan-Asian restaurants through out the United States.

Tortillas: A tortilla is unleavened flat bread made of corn or wheat flour, water, vegetable shortening and a little salt. They are the plate, envelope or wrap surrounding an array of delicious fillings. The word "tortilla" comes from the Spanish word "torta", which means "round cake".

Quick & easy recipes

Low-fat Cheese & Egg Sandwich (Ingredients per person)

- ¼ cup egg substitute
- 1 slice of fat-free cheese
- 1 flat bread (pita or naan)

In a pre-heated 300°F oven, warm flat bread(s) for about 5 to 7 minutes. While the bread is warming, scramble egg(s). Remove flat bread(s) from oven and spread scrambled egg(s) over the top. Cut cheese into strips and place over the top of the egg and flat bread. Place under a broiler or toaster oven until cheese melts and is bubbly. Provides 1 serving.

Nutrient Analysis: One serving provides approximately: 233 calories, 15 g protein, 35 g carbohydrates, 1 g dietary fiber, 3 g fat (1 g saturated), 1 mg cholesterol, 66 mcg folate, 3 mg iron, 135 mg calcium, 312 mg potassium and 588 mg sodium.

Chocolate Delight

- ¼ cup chocolate chips
- ¼ cup M & M's®
- ½ cup mini marshmallows
- 1 whole pita bread
- Caramel topping

Pre-heat oven to 350°F. Sprinkle chocolate chips, M & M's and mini marshmallows over pita. Drizzle with caramel topping. Place on a cookie sheet and bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Cut into 4 wedges. Makes 4 servings.

Nutrient Analysis: One serving provides approximately: 197 calories, 3 g protein, 33 g carbohydrates, 2 g dietary fiber, 8 g fat (4 g saturated), 2 mg cholesterol, 16 mcg folate, 1 mg iron, 32 mg calcium, 106 mg potassium and 99 mg sodium.

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