

## Make your own protein bars for better taste, nutrition

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Nutritionist Pam Vagnieres teaches classes on making your own protein bars. ( CLIFF GRASSMICK )

Eating on the go is often a sad fact of contemporary life. But what you choose for your portable snack can make a big difference in your health and your pocketbook.

Local nutritionist and exercise physiologist, Pam Vagnieres of Nutri-Physique, says commercial protein bars run the gamut from healthy choice to glorified candy bar. Lara Bars and Luna Bars top her list as good choices.

But for those who want to control exactly what's in their bars, she suggests putting a slow food spin on a fast food experience by making your own bars. Vagnieres teaches classes on making protein bars; the next one is March 24.

She says home-made protein bars have several advantages. They can be designed to your own personal taste with ingredients such as chocolate, cashews, cherries, or citrus flavors.

"Taste is my No. 1 motivator. You have to love what you eat."

Home-made bars are also cheaper than purchased bars, which can run \$1.50 to \$3. Home-made bars generally cost from 40 to 80 cents each, Vagnieres says.

Lisa Lanzano of Essential Nutrition in Boulder, also advises clients to make their own bars. She adds that it's important to make sure the ingredients in the bars are high quality.

"Natural food stores are good to get the real food ingredients," Lanzano says. "They're always preferable. If you don't have a natural food store nearby, then look for the natural foods aisle in your local grocery store."

Organic fruits are preferable, since they not only will have been raised without pesticides, they also will not have preservatives in dried fruits.

While making your own bars sounds complicated, Vagnieres says most bars take only about 20 minutes to put together. They should be stored in the refrigerator or frozen.

Both Vagnieres and Lanzano say that while protein bars are convenient, they shouldn't be a regular substitute for a meal. "All protein bars still have their place, but when we talk about the higher quality diet, we want to go with the natural state foods," Lanzano says.

**Real food:** Avoid bars with lots of unrecognizable names of chemicals.

"I look for the bars that contain real food such as nuts, seeds, nut butters and sweetened with only fruit, says Liza Lanzano of Essential Nutrition. "These bars will have at least 4-5 grams of fiber, coming from the natural foods they are made from. Try to find a bar that is relatively low in sugar. Don't worry too much about numbers, just look for bars with a few ingredients that are all real foods that you know and recognize."

Taste enhancers such as MSG, are often hidden under a number of different names including autolyzed yeast extract, hydrolyzed vegetable protein, calcium caseinate, sodium caseinate, yeast extract, and even natural flavors.

"Make it simple. If you see a paragraph of tiny words you can't pronounce, move on," says Pam Vagnieres of Nutri-Physique.

**Well-balanced:** Vagnieres says to look for is a 1-1 or a 2-1 ratio of carbohydrate to protein.

**Vegetarians beware:** Watch out for fish or beef hidden in some ingredients lists in the form of gelatins. If you're vegan, look out for casein and whey.

### **Pecan Cocoa Bars**

2 1/4 cup raw or lightly baked pecans

1 heaping teaspoon cinnamon

13 pitted medjool dates

3/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder

1 1/2 teaspoon vanilla

1 teaspoon instant espresso powder (optional)

2-3 tablespoon water (only if needed)

Whole pecans for topping each bar

Directions: Pit and rinse 13 dates in a colander with warm water, drain. Blend pecans and cinnamon in food processor until nuts are finely ground.

Add dates, cocoa powder, vanilla and espresso powder until mixture sticks together slightly.

Add water (only if the mixture pressed in your hand does not stick together) and process briefly.

Press into a 9-by-9-inch glass baking dish and firmly roll out between two sheets of wax or parchment paper to desired thickness (1/2-inch recommended).

Slice into bars and press a pecan into each bar.

Chill for two hours until firm. Store in freezer or fridge.

*Source: Pam Vagnieres*

### **Gluten Free Trail Bars**

1 cup almond butter

1 cup brown rice syrup or honey

3/4 cup chopped walnuts

1 cup dried cherries

1 2/3 cup puffed millet

1 2/3 cup puffed rice

1/4 cup pumpkin seeds

3/4 cup sunflower seeds

1/3 cup quinoa flakes

Directions: Lightly coat a 9-by-13-inch baking pan with canola oil.

In a large saucepan, heat almond butter with brown rice syrup over low heat until bubbles form. Quickly stir in remaining ingredients and mix well.

When cool enough to handle, press into baking pan. Cool completely. Cut into 20 bars.

Makes 20 servings.

*Source: Canyon Ranch Health Resort*

### **Power Bars**

2 cups whole wheat flour

1/2 cup packed brown sugar

1/4 cup skim milk powder

1/4 cup wheat germ

1/2 cup molasses

1/3 cup all-natural peanut butter

2 eggs

1/2 cup vegetable oil

1/2 cup unsalted sunflower seeds or walnuts

1 1/2 cups raisins/apricots chopped and dried

1 teaspoon baking powder

Directions: In bowl, combine flour, sugar, milk powder, wheat germ and baking powder. Stir in raisins (or apricots - and seeds. Mix eggs, oil, molasses, and peanut butter. Add to dry stuff; blend well. Spread in greased 9-inch cake pan. Bake 350 degrees, 35 minutes or until browned and firm to touch. Let cool, cut in 24 bars.

Can store on shelf, in air-tight container, for up to 5 days.

*Source: Prevention Magazine, 1997*

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