

Make Healthier Grilled Cheeses

Who doesn't love a great grilled cheese sandwich? Grilled cheese seems like the perfect food. It's easy to make, has few ingredients and sports a crispy crust and a warm, gooey, cheesy center. In fact it was one of the first foods that my children learned to cook when they were young.

What's not to love? How about the 410 calories and 18 grams of saturated fat per sandwich? We don't love that. Grilled cheese can attribute its high fat and calories to the butter spread on the outside of the bread to make it crispy and the copious amounts of cheese in the middle. Pair that with a couple of slices of plain white bread and you have a nutritious disaster.

But do you really need all of that to make a perfect grilled cheese sandwich? NO! Here are five secrets for how to make grilled cheese that saves calories and fat to boot.

1. Pick the right cheese: When it comes to grilled cheese, not all cheese is created equal. Some people love American cheese. It has superior melting qualities, but it falls short on flavor so skip mild-flavored cheeses and opt for ones with a stronger flavor—like sharp, or even extra-sharp, Cheddar. Blue cheese is also a great option. You'll get more bang for your buck and because it's big on flavor you won't have to use as much, which helps cut fat and calories.
2. Thin beyond cheese for flavor: Ok, so cheese is a necessary ingredient. But you don't have to have mounds of it to make the perfect grilled cheese sandwich. You can get that hit of soft melted loveliness that cheese contributes by using just a little—mixing it with other ingredients like mashed beans or even salsa and hot chilies.
3. Choose better bread: Whole-grain breads are great to use.
4. Master a crispy crust: Skip the butter and use a panini maker.
5. Know that everything isn't better with butter: The butter on the outside of a grilled cheese sandwich not only crisps up the crust, but gives it richness as well. But since grilled cheese is already rich, you really don't need butter for the flavor either. Instead, experiment with creamy spreads you put inside that are lower in fat such as reduced-fat mayonnaise with a squeeze of lemon or reduced-fat sour cream mixed with chopped fresh herbs. They'll add that silky mouthfeel and sense of richness you may be missing without the butter but with less fat and calories.