

Activity: Food/Cooking Goal: Physical Populations: All

## TH Activity Plan – No Bake Healthy Date Cookies

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Photo by Whole Kids Foundation.org



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will make no bake cookies that are nutritious & flavorful with dates, rolled oats & cinnamon.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Expand knowledge about nutrition, plant-based ingredients, sugar intake & healthy substitutions; learn about diet impact on chronic health diseases

**Physical:** Improve nutrition by expanding knowledge about food choices, healthy eating strategies & sampling tasty healthy cookies

**Psychological/Emotional:** Discuss eating habits, cravings & strategies for eating healthier; discuss food addictions

**Sensory:** Use all five senses making & eating nutritious cookies

**Social:** Work cooperatively in a group setting; or work independently reducing need for cues

**Materials**

3 cups rolled oats

¾ cup dates, pitted

1-1/2 c. almond butter

½ c. shredded coconut

1 orange zested & juiced

½ t. cinnamon

Pinch sea salt optional

100% all-fruit preserves

Food processor, bowls, knives, water, parchment paper, cookie sheets, fridge

Napkins, gloves, wipes

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials.
2. Facilitator begins session by talking about safe food handling, nutrition benefits & process.
3. Participants measure ingredients as needed. Begin with soaking dates in warm water for 15 min.
4. Grind oats in blender & have ready to add to recipe. Then grind dates in blender with ½ cup of soaking liquid & its puree. An option to using food processor – participants can use a knife to chop ingredients finer.
5. Add dates to ground oats + almond butter, coconut, orange zest & juice, cinnamon & salt. Knead together with hands or spoon to form dough. Divide dough amongst participants. Form into small balls. Press middle of balls with thumb imprint, then fill this with fruit preserve. Refrigerate for 1 hr.
6. Eat! Discuss strategies like swapping nutritious foods for less nutritious food choices (honey for sugar, infused water for soda), snacks that are healthy, identifying time of day when food cravings happen.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** For populations with nutrition/diet health goals, this TH activity can provide an opportunity to discuss challenges, food addictions, negative health impacts and strategies for improving lifestyle food choices using a hands-on tasty approach

complimenting talk therapy. People with chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity as well as young people learning about healthy food choices can benefit from the multi-domain health goals focused on

nutrition literacy. The tactile and gustatory sensory engagement can appeal to people with cognitive impairment, vision impairment and hearing deficits. Physical accommodations can be made for people with gripping challenges (using hands not spoons for mixing, measuring spoons with wider grips), or vision impairment (use trays with grip mats to reduce bowls sliding, practice using sense of touch for measuring/mixing/forming cookie shapes & spacing). The visual components of the TH activity (printed recipe, looking at ingredients, measuring tools) can appeal to people with hearing impairments.

To increase the physical component, participants can chop ingredients into finer morsels in place of using a food processor. This, and mixing the ingredients takes hand and arm strength. Assistance can be provided where necessary or, taking more time and breaks will also provide some accommodation.

This TH activity can be done virtually if participants have helpers or family who can assist with using a food processor or blender and can pre-purchase ingredients. The recipe can be sent ahead of session digitally or hard copy, and the facilitator/client can communicate in live time using a computer or phone. Chopping ingredients into smaller parts, as mentioned in previous paragraph can be a substitution for blenders. Whether done virtually or in-person, *No Bake Healthy Date Cookies* activity works both as a group activity or by individuals. The latter requires more physical activity when done by one person.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.** Facilitator needs to ascertain food allergies (almond butter is an ingredient), salt intolerance, swallowing issues or contraindications with medication prior to session. Some populations or individuals may not have access to food processors, blenders or knives, or have safety clearance to use them. Some facilities may have restrictions on the use of these mechanized kitchen tools.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** This activity is based on an online recipe from Whole Kids Foundation created by Dr. Loel Fuhrman. It was developed because of its nutritional benefits with high amounts of fiber, magnesium, iron, potassium and vitamin B6. It is a fun activity with tactile sensory elements and the cookies are tasty! Ingredients each have health benefits. Cinnamon (spice) is recognized as having antioxidant, antibiotic and anti-inflammatory properties with the active ingredient – cinnamaldehyde (Griffin, 2023). Dates can help with gut health due to their high fiber. Their antioxidants are effective in combating free radicals found in chronic disease, and reduce inflammation which can boost brain health for example (Cleveland Clinic, 2024).

Discussions in this session or subsequent sessions can touch on the above noted health/nutritional benefits, portion control, sugar intake, food preferences, cultural food traditions, or plant-based diets.

#### **REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Cleveland Clinic. (2024). The sweet health benefits of dates. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/benefits-of-dates>

Griffin, R. M. (2023). Cinnamon: Health benefits and side effects. WebMD.

<https://www.webmd.com/diet/supplement-guide-cinnamon>

[MiPlato /My Plate](https://www.fns.usda.gov/resource/myplate-miplato) <https://www.fns.usda.gov/resource/myplate-miplato>

Parrish, C. (2021). Try delicious holiday food traditions from around the world.

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TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.