

Raw Vegan Chocolate Cheesecake

Ingredients

Crust

- 2 1/4 cups (180g) finely shredded coconut, unsweetened
- 3 tbsp* (60ml) cacao powder
- 1 tsp vanilla bean powder
- 1 1/2 cups (360g) medjool dates
- Pinch salt

Filling

- 1 cup (168g) cacao butter, grated
- 1/2 cup (50g) cacao powder
- 1/4 cup (80g) raw agave nectar
- 400ml coconut milk
- 1/4 tsp vanilla bean powder
- 1/64 tsp salt, finely ground

Topping

- 2 squares of raw vegan chocolate



Method

Crust

1. Put coconut, cacao powder, vanilla and salt into a food processor and pulse briefly to mix.
2. Add the pitted dates and process until the dates are finely chopped and the mixture starts to clump.
3. Press into a 20cm (8 inch) flan, cheesecake or springform tin and leave in the fridge to firm a little while you prepare the filling.

Filling

1. Put all ingredients into a high-speed blender in the order listed.
2. Blend on low until combined, then blend on high until it reaches 42°C.
3. Pour filling into the crust and leave uncovered in the fridge to set for 4 hours or overnight.

Topping

1. Grate a couple of squares of your favourite raw vegan chocolate over the top of the cheesecake.
2. Slice and serve.
3. Store covered in the refrigerator for up to 5 days, or freeze for up to three months.

Makes

1 cake, 1.2kg (16 serves)

Equipment

Food processor
Blender
Springform tin

Time

- Before: -
- During: 30 mins
- After: 4 hours or overnight

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Recipe Prep Checklist

Ingredients

- 2 1/4 cups (180g) finely shredded coconut, unsweetened
- 3 tbsp* (60ml) cacao powder
- 1 + 1/4 tsp vanilla bean powder
- 1 1/2 cups (360g) medjool dates
- Pinch + 1/64 tsp salt, finely ground
- 1 cup (168g) cacao butter, grated
- 1/2 cup (50g) cacao powder
- 1/4 cup (80g) raw agave nectar
- 400ml coconut milk
- 2 squares of your favourite raw vegan chocolate

* Australian tablespoon (20ml)

Equipment

- Kitchen scales (optional, to weight out ingredients)
- Food processor
- Blender
- Mortar and pestle (optional, to grind salt finely)
- Hand-held grater
- 20cm / 8" springform tin
- 1 cup measure
- 1/2 cup measure
- 1/4 cup measure
- 1 tablespoon (20ml) measure
- 1 teaspoon measure
- 1/4 teaspoon measure
- Small bowl (optional, for weighing ingredients into)
- Small jug (optional, for weighing coconut milk into)

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Tips

- Any fine, shredded, desiccated, unsweetened coconut will work for this recipe.
- If you don't have any raw cacao powder on hand, you can substitute cocoa powder. Just make sure it is unsweetened cocoa powder, or it will taste way too sweet.
- Vanilla bean powder is just fresh vanilla beans air-dried and ground into a powder using a spice blender or coffee grinder. You can make your own or you can buy it from your local health food shop. If you can't get your hands on any of this, you can just scrape out a fresh vanilla bean or two into the mix, or add 1-2 tsp of vanilla extract.
- Medjool dates are big, sweet, soft and sticky dates that you usually find in the fresh produce section, or at your local health food store. They're softer than regular dates, and have more of a caramelly taste and add a rich sweetness to recipes. If you're using regular dates, you'll need to soak them in water for a couple of hours first. Drain them, but keep the soak water to use in the recipe, for an extra date-y taste.
- The crust appears a little crumbly, but holds together once you squash it into your tin. If you like, you could probably add a couple of teaspoons of finely ground flax meal to help with the binding, but you don't really need to.
- Make sure that your cacao butter is finely grated (or in kibbles) before you add it to the blender. If it is in large chunks, it won't break down and incorporate properly before the mixture heats up to 42°C. Using melted cacao butter is not as ideal as grated, as the increase in starting temperature gives you less time to blend the filling before it overheats.
- If you don't want to use cacao butter at all, you could try using shea butter, or even a mix of shea butter and coconut oil. If you use all coconut oil, the filling will not set firmly enough.
- You can substitute the agave nectar for your favourite liquid sweetener, such as maple syrup (not raw), coconut nectar, yacon syrup, raw honey (not vegan) or something else. I haven't tried making it with any of these, and I'm guessing that they will change the flavour slightly, but the filling should still set just fine.
- You can use tinned coconut milk (which is what I use) or make your own from shredded coconut and water. You may find that the fat content of the coconut milk affects the final texture and firmness of the cheesecake filling, so try a few different brands to see which one you like best.

Tips (cont.)

- So far, we've found that it seems to work well with a lower fat content coconut milk, such as Spiral Organics light coconut milk (the same one I use for my decadent coconut vanilla ice-cream), which has around 6% fat, but it also works fine with an 18% fat coconut milk. But if your coconut milk is too watery, you may find that your filling does not set properly.
- I use pink Himalayan crystal salt in my dishes because it contains lots of trace minerals that are good for you, and apparently it tastes better too. We make sure ours is finely ground (we use a mortar and pestle) to avoid any nasty salty pockets in the finished dish from undissolved salt grains.
- The idea is to blend the filling for as long as possible without overheating it, as this adds volume and lightness to the filling when it sets.
- If you're not sure how to check the temperature of your mix as it blends, there's a few options. You can feel the outside of the jug, and stop once it starts to feel warm. You can also stop blending as soon as the mix starts to steam just a little. Both of these methods are very rough and can't guarantee that the mix won't overheat. If you want better accuracy, you can use a kitchen thermometer, and for speed and convenience, I highly recommend getting yourself an infrared thermometer. Mine has become one of my favourite kitchen gadgets and we use it ALL the time.
- Once you've poured the filling into the crust, be sure to leave it uncovered for at least a couple of hours to cool down. Otherwise, it will sweat, and you'll get nasty condensation forming and spoiling the surface of your masterpiece. Once it's set, you can safely cover it or put it into an air-tight container to stop it from drying out.
- This raw vegan chocolate cheesecake is completely nut-free, making it perfect for social occasions where people might have allergies to nuts.
- One slice of this cheesecake does go a long way, so you may find that you need (or want) to cut them even more finely – partly to ensure that people don't get overwhelmed, but it also helps the cake to go further.
- This cheesecake can be covered and frozen, for up to 3 months. It doesn't cut very well straight from the freezer, so I recommend leaving it to thaw in the fridge for several hours before trying to divvy it up.

Variations

- Different toppings: I used a homemade raw vegan chocolate orange chocolate for grating, but you really can use anything you like – plain, mint, orange – the possibilities are endless and give you lots of ways to dress up your cheesecake. You don't even have to use grated chocolate, either. You could try shredded coconut, crumbled dried oranges, a mint cashew “icing” or whatever you normally love pairing with chocolate.
- Different crusts: If you want to add a bit of crunch to your crust, try adding some walnuts, pecans or activated buckwheat to the mix before you process it. Of course the walnuts and pecans would mean that this dessert is no longer nut-free.
- Mini Chocolate Cheesecakes: Add a layer of crust to a small bowl or ramekin and pour a layer of filling on to top make mini cheesecakes.
- Nut-Free Chocolate Parfait: Make some cashew cream (or your favourite raw vegan cream), and layer it with the chocolate mix and fresh fruit to make a parfait.
- Nut-free Chocolate Mousse: You can skip the crust altogether, and just make the filling, and pour it into bowls or jars instead, for a nut-free chocolate mousse. In jars, you can pour a little melted chocolate in a layer over the top to help seal it, and in bowls, you can just grate a little chocolate over the top to finish it off.
- Nut-free Chocolate Biscuits: The chocolate crust mixture is perfect for forming into all kinds of shapes – cookies, macarons, truffles, energy bites. Just shape the mix, squish it a bit so it holds together, and refrigerate, freeze or dehydrate until they're firm and ready to eat. Or, you can eat the mix straight out the bowl like me!
- Carob Chocolate Cheesecake: Given the similar taste and properties of carob versus cacao, you could very easily swap out the cacao powder for carob powder and make yourself a chocolate-free raw vegan cheesecake.
- White Chocolate Cheesecake: If you're feeling adventurous, you could try making a “white chocolate” version of this cheesecake. Basically leave out the cacao powder from the crust and the filling, and see how it goes. This is something I've been wanting to try for a while, but I haven't got around to it yet.
- Caramel Cheesecake: You could try substituting the cacao powder for mesquite powder, or even lucuma powder to create a caramelly-flavoured cheesecake. Again I haven't tried this, but maybe one day...
- Berry Cheesecake: If you swap the cacao powder for freeze-dried berry powder, either in the filling-only, or even in the crust and the filling, you could create a really nice berry-flavoured nut-free raw vegan cheesecake. Just saying!

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FAQs

Why didn't my cheesecake filling set?

The fat content in the raw cheesecake filling is very important to help it to set properly.

If your filling hasn't set, it might be because the coconut milk you used was either too watery (i.e. from a 1L UHT container instead of a 400ml tin) or that it didn't have a high enough fat content (i.e. it was a "light" coconut milk).

You can check the fat content of your coconut milk by looking at the nutritional panel and seeing how much fat there is per 100ml. Around 15-25% is great, 10% is on the low side but should still work. And 5% or less just won't be enough for it to set properly.

With this recipe, the more fat the better!

Why doesn't my cheesecake filling have little bubbles in it?

This is probably for the same reasons as above – the fat content of your coconut milk.

I've found that the higher to fat content of the coconut milk, the more it seems to trap air bubbles in my raw vegan recipes, so check your fat content, and use a higher one if you want to get the "whipped" effect in your filling.

The other thing you might want to do is make sure that you've blended it for long enough.

This recipe was the result of over-blending our raw vegan chocolate recipe, so don't worry about overdoing the blending a little.

Just keep an eye on the temperature if you want to be sure to keep it 100% raw.

Can I make the cheesecake filling in a food processor?

Honestly, I've only ever made this in my Vitamix blender, so I can't say for sure.

I will say that you do need to blend it VERY well to make it super smooth and to warm it up enough that all of the oils melt completely.

One of my readers tried doing it with a stick blender, but that didn't turn out very

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FAQs (cont.)

well at all and made a big mess.

It will depend a bit on how big your food processor is, how well it contains liquids and how well it copes with running for extended periods until the contents warm up.

Why is my cheesecake crust so solid?

There's a couple of reasons why your crust may have turned out a little more solid and sticky than mine.

Firstly, if you over-process the coconut and dates, it can turn into more of a smooth, sticky paste.

So only go as far as you need to until the ingredients are well combined and the dates are chopped finely, but no more.

Secondly, it could also be that your dates were wetter than the ones I used, so they turned into mush instead of getting chopped into little pieces and mixing with the coconut.

What can I use instead of agave nectar?

With this raw vegan cheesecake recipe you should be able to use any liquid sweetener you want to.

Things like maple syrup (not raw), raw honey (not vegan), coconut nectar, yacon syrup, blackstrap molasses (not raw) or brown rice syrup (not raw) are all possibilities for using instead of the agave nectar.

One of my readers even used a banana to add some additional sweetness.

I haven't made this dessert with any of these agave nectar alternatives, so I can't say exactly how each of them will work.

Most likely, they will change the flavour a little, but the filling should still set fine.

Keep in mind that these are all still forms of sugar, so unless you have a specific issue with fructose (which agave is especially high in), they all should be used in moderation in a healthy diet.

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FAQs (cont.)

Where can I get cacao butter from?

You should be able to buy raw organic cacao butter from your local health food store.

It's usually available in blocks, buttons, flakes or kibbles. I prefer kibbles or flakes because then I don't have to grate it myself.

If you don't have any luck there, try going online for a local supplier who can ship to you.

Here's some options from Amazon to get you started:

Healthworks Cacao Butter Raw Organic, 1lb <http://amzn.to/2uXqqaT>

Terrasoul Superfoods Raw Organic Cacao Butter, 16 Ounces

<http://amzn.to/2uUbpZ7>

Divine Organics, 16oz Raw Cacao Butter / Cocoa Butter <http://amzn.to/2u2EQJw>

What can I use instead of cacao butter?

The cacao butter is a key ingredient for getting this raw cheesecake to set properly.

The only other ingredient that has similar properties is shea butter, which sets a little more firmly than cacao butter. You might also be able to use a blend of shea butter and coconut oil to achieve a good firm set.

Keep in mind that you'd need to find a food-grade shea butter, and it might not be any less expensive than cacao butter.

You might also be able to swap some of the cacao butter for coconut oil, although that would mean that the filling doesn't set as well, and it will readily melt once it comes out of the fridge or freezer.

Can I use carob powder instead of cocoa powder?

Absolutely! The properties and taste of carob and chocolate are similar enough that it should work really well to substitute the cocoa powder for carob powder.

I haven't tried this myself, but I expect that it would be really delicious.

You'd need to still use the cacao butter, to get the filling to set properly, although you might be able to use shea butter instead, if you want to avoid cacao altogether.

FAQs (cont.)

Did you really mean 1/64 of a teaspoon of salt?

Yes, I did.

I bought myself one of those fancy measuring spoon sets that goes down to 1/64 of a teaspoon, so I can be super accurate with my recipes.

I am a scientist after all!

I found that if I used more than that amount, it was too salty, but without it, the flavour just wasn't quite right.

If it's any help, it's 1/4 of 1/4 of 1/4 of a teaspoon, or you could just go with a small pinch and see how it goes!