

Date and Tahini Protein Smoothie (with cocoa!)



**Date +
Tahini
Protein Smoothie**

It's 7am and both the husband and the child are still sleeping. We're on 'vacation' time now so the kid has been going to sleep at around 9pm, which means she's been sleeping until 8ish and we are all loving every second of it. I thought I might steal a few quiet moments to myself this morning—fresh cup of brewed coffee, sitting chair all to myself—to finish this post in peace. I'm kinda excited about it (well if that's not the nerdiest thing to be excited about, I'm not sure what is).





So it's New Year's Eve (day) or, as my mother-in-law would call it, *erev* New Year's. I gotta say, I don't get too caught up in this new year's. I really, and not to sound like a pretentious boob, but I really get caught up in Rosh Hashanah. I don't make resolutions or get too nostalgic around the 31st.

I do, however, get extremely reflective during Rosh Hashanah. I remember the Rosh Hashanah before she was even conceived. I prayed so hard to get pregnant that year. I mean I implored myself to Gd to get pregnant. I felt it in my bones. I have never felt that kind of spirituality while waiting in line at a club in Chicago for an overpriced (and usually over hyped) NYE party in the early 2000s. I mean I've certainly *prayed* while waiting in line at a club in Chicago for an overpriced NYE party and I DEFINITELY prayed after those parties. If I remember correctly, I think those prayers went a little like this:

"Oh dear Gd who is in heaven, please send a cab my way. I realize that this is the lamest thing to pray for but it's 14 degrees in Chicago tonight and I'm not properly dressed for this weather because my real winter coat is chin to ankle-length and hauling that thing around the club was not in the cards tonight. There was no way I was going to pay \$20 to check my coat when I paid \$80 to get into the club. I mean, that's just good budgeting. Am I right? Also? These shoes are killing me (but dannnnng, they look fierce) so could you help a sister out? Please? Anything? No? Fair call."



Ahhhh, those days are long gone. Gone are the days when I felt internal pressure to have a good time on NYE. I feel absolutely no internal need (spurred on by what the kids are now calling, FOMO or Fear Of Missing Out) to prove to the world or social media that I know how to party and I'd like to take a moment to thank my mid-30s for that. Nope. For the past 3 NYEs, my husband and I have had the same ritual. He makes some slammin' homemade sushi while I set up our porch with the air mattress and all the pillows and blankets so that it's very comfortable and we watch whatever movie we've

finally agreed upon while eating said sushi and downing some sort of bubbling adult beverage. Some times we make it to midnight. Some times we don't. Either way, there's no praying to Gd for help with anything during NYE as of late. Those prayers of help have turned into prayers of thanks and I'm ever so grateful for that progression.



Testing out my new light with my favorite model

Moving right along, in my quest to be a teeeeeny bit more healthy (read: no longer eat pasta at minimum 3 nights a week) and to embrace the fact that I can officially no longer eat like a 25 year-old, I've taken to eating banana-based protein smoothies for breakfast and it's actually been good for me. My favorite has really been anything with almond milk and banana with the addition of raw cocoa nibs. Raw cocoa nibs can be expensive but they'll last a long time so I do recommend the investment. I've been known, from time to time, to make one of these here protein smoothies for the kiddo, throw some cocoa nibs in there and call it a chocolate milk shake. She totally buys it. Ha, ha. Sucker.



Date and Tahini Protein Smoothie

Ingredients:

1 ripe banana
1/4 cup tahini
1/4 cup peanut butter
2 cups of almond milk (I like mine more 'milky' than a thick shake so cut it down by 1 to 1/2 a cup if you like it thicker)
1/2 cup pitted dates (roughly 8-9 dates)

Optional:

2 tbsp raw cocoa nibs
1 tbsp flaxseed
2 tbsp cocoa or carob powder

Directions:

Place all ingredients into blender (preferably a Vitamix or another aggressive blender) and blend for 20 – 30 seconds or until all ingredients are smooth.

Mexican Egg Bake: Bring on the protein!



I couldn't access the accent over the "E", so please do excuse my spelling of "Olé"

Shalom! How was everyone's holiday? Fantastic? Not so much? Ours was frikkin' fantastic. I'm sorry, I can't contain it. My regular life consists of work, entertaining/making sure my toddler turns into a nice person, episodes of Call the Midwife and sleep. So when the holidays came around and school went on break and my husband came into town for 2 whole weeks, I decided we were going to live it up. And by "live it up", I mean scour Air b n' b for cheap deals on other people's finished basements so that we can take a family trip to Joshua Tree. We finally found a place and it was heaven. It's weird if you think about it--the fact that we spent 3 nights and 4 days in someone's attached studio apartment for our vacation--but the inexpensiveness of it all helps one to get past that weirdness. Anyway, our small little family hit the road for Joshua Tree. We went hiking in the park, broke out the husband's birthday gift, a toddler backpack for carrying the kiddo during hikes, and climbed a bunch of cliffs. There were

multiple occasions when I thought to myself "For sure, if my mom was here, she'd have passed out by now out of sheer anxiety/fear not only because of the heights but because our 2 and a half year-old also did a little rock climbing herself".

Ahhh, oh well. We made it out alive and discovered that the kid likes to climb. Since returning home, she's attempted to climb into her crib just for the thrill of it.





We've got one more week of winter break left and there are big plans for some home improvement projects and d.i.y. craft projects. I've got the husband for one more week and I hope to

use my time wisely. I've gone crazy on Pinterest lately (if you follow me you'll notice that my board, "Suuuuuure, I'm gonna make that" has been seeing A LOT of action in the last week). The other thing I'm going to do is cook . . . a lot. It's embarrassing to admit, but now that I'm officially in my mid-30s, it's time I FINALLY regulate my carb intake, which means I'm making a lot of smoothies and a lot of egg dishes.

Below is one of those dishes. The inspiration came from an AMAZING baked egg dish I had for brunch at Michael's Genuine Food and Drink in Miami. It was ooey, gooey and smothered in cheese. Pretty much how I like all my food. But since I'm obsessed with cilantro and black beans, I decided to add my own flair to the dish. This dish is packed with protein and perfect for brunch, lunch and/or dinner. It really doesn't matter. It's also extremely adaptable. If black beans and cilantro aren't your thing, try using what you like-- cubed butternut squash and parmesan or spinach and feta. The choice is yours, my friend. Whatever you decide, I hope you enjoy! Oh! Also, I included a few photos from our Joshua Tree vacation just for funsies.









Mexican Egg Bake

Ingredients:

- 1 can diced tomatoes (preferably with jalapeno)
- 2 tbsp tomato paste

4 eggs (or more depending on how many ramekins you need)
1/2 cup black beans
1/2 tbsp kosher salt
1 tsp black pepper
1/2 cup shredded cheese
Fresh cilantro for garnish

Instructions:

*Serving size will depend upon how many ramekins you have. The instructions below reflect the amount needed for 4 ramekins.

1. Pre-heat oven to 400 degrees. Empty diced tomatoes into medium saucepan and heat over medium high heat. Add the tomato paste and stir. Bring to a boil and then let simmer for roughly 3 minutes or so. Taste and add seasoning as needed.

2. Remove pan from heat. Place 2 heaping tablespoons of tomato sauce into the ramekins. Top with 1 big scoop of black beans and top with sprinkling of shredded cheese and another tablespoon of tomato sauce. Finally, make a little divot into the mixture and crack one egg into each ramekin. Top with a sprinkling of salt and pepper.

3. Place ramekins onto a baking sheet and place into oven. Bake for 8 minutes. Take out of oven and top with a bit more cheese and then let it bake for another 2 minutes or so. You want the middle of the ramekins to be soft and jiggly (yes, 'jiggly' is a completely legitimate cooking term). Take out of oven and garnish as needed.



‘ Carrot Cake ’ Latkes +

Whipped Cream Cheese Frosting



Here's something I forgot to prep for: My Jewish kid wondering who that rather large man in the red suit is. Now that the kiddo is old enough to be aware of her surroundings, I'm struggling with how to make sure she has a place in this Christmas-dominant world. I gotta say, this is one area where the kid's obsession with Frozen is coming in handy because I basically tell her that every single house/building that is covered in twinkling Christmas lights is, in fact, Arendelle.

I'd like to take a moment now to personally thank the city of Beverly Hills for going WAY overboard with their Christmas lights. It makes the kid feel like she is literally walking in Arendelle every. Single. Night.



Nothing is wrong with Christmas. In fact, I kinda like it. I like the twinkling lights and the holiday cheer and the food is phenomenal. And I certainly don't want to pretend that Hanukkah is anything like Christmas. I'm kinda frustrated that someone has gone ahead and taken the whole "Elf on the Shelf" thing and tried to Hanukkah-ize it with Mensch on a Bench. I feel very strong in the fact that making Hanukkah more 'like' Christmas isn't going to make Jewish kids feel less alienated during the Christmas season. I feel, more than anything, that what's going to help Jewish kids feel less alienated or less 'left out' is to work on creating a strong sense of ownership at home over Hanukkah and your family's traditions. I think it's OK to feel 'left out'. Feeling 'left out' is what creates resiliency and confidence over one's choices and values. I used to sit in church and watch my dad sing in the choir on Christmas Eve but I could do that because my mom provided us an extremely prevalent and tangible Jewish home life.



OK, enough of my soap box and let's talk about these here latkes. These latkes can be eaten without the whipped cream cheese frosting. I mean, one could choose to eat them without

the frosting but why would one do that? I originally conceived of this dish as a latke and dip but the fact of the matter is that I like my latkes SUPER crispy and if you do decide to dip these in the frosting, they might fall off. Therefore, in my expert opinion, I think you should just go ahead and smear that frosting right on top of the latke. Heck, you can sandwich it between two latkes and make it a 'carrot cake' latke sandwich! Either way, I hope you enjoy and Happy Chanukkah!



However you take them, just TAKE THEM. They're so good.

"Carrot Cake" Latkes with Whipped Cream Cheese Frosting

Ingredients for Latkes:
(Makes 8 – 10 latkes)

3 medium sweet potatoes
1 cup baby carrot sticks OR 5 – 6 large/fat carrots
6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1/2 tbsp coconut or light brown sugar
1/2 tbsp cardamom

1/2 tbsp cinnamon
1 teaspoon baking powder
2 large eggs
Sunflower oil

Ingredients for Whipped Cream Cheese Frosting:

8 oz Cream cheese at room temperature
1 tsp vanilla
3/4 cup powdered sugar
1/2 cup heavy cream OR half & half

How to Make Latkes:

First, set up a large bowl of ice water in the sink. You will pour the shredded sweet potatoes and carrots in the ice bath immediately after shredding.

Peel sweet potatoes. Using the large holes of a box grater or in a food processor, shred the sweet potatoes and carrots (they can be done in the same bowl). Transfer to the ice bath so as to prevent browning. Let soak for a few minutes while you clean out your food processor. Next, transfer to a clean dishtowel or cheesecloth sling and wring out as much juice as you can.

Transfer grated sweet potato and carrot mixture to a medium bowl. In a small dish, whisk flour, cardamom, cinnamon and baking powder and toss with the sweet potatoes and carrots, coating them evenly. Whisk eggs in this small dish until lightly beaten and stir into mixture.

Add sunflower oil to a large frying pan that reaches a depth of 1/8 inch. Heat slowly over medium to about 365 degrees F. Scoop mixture out with large kitchen spoon (usually I lose the spoon after a while and just get in there with my hands). Squeeze the mixture firmly in your palm over an empty dish to remove any excess liquid. (If you squeezed the potatoes out thoroughly in the cloth, you may not have much

excess liquid to squeeze out). Shape the mixture into a tight ball.

Carefully test the heat of your oil by dropping a few droplets of water into the oil. If it sizzles immediately, it's ready.

Next, place the ball carefully into the hot oil. After a couple seconds, using a spatula, press down into the ball. If you can get them into the hot oil in one piece, chances are they will stick together – frying them is like the “glue” that holds them together. It takes a gentle touch, and it may take you some practice to get the “feel” for it.

The oil should sizzle, but not pop when the latke hits it; if the oil jumps wildly or smokes, it is too hot. If it only bubbles weakly, the oil is not hot enough. Use the first latke to test the oil temperature, and don't fry a whole batch until the temperature is right.

Continue shaping the latkes in this way, using 2 tablespoons of mixture for each latke. Fry in batches of 4-5 latkes at a time (no more than that – don't crowd the pan) for 2-3 minutes per side until brown and crispy. Remove the latkes from the frying pan and let oil soak on paper towel.

How to Make Whipped Cream Cheese Frosting:

Beat the cheese, sugar and vanilla until smooth and fluffy. In a separate bowl, beat the heavy cream to nearly stiff peaks, then add the whipped cream into the cheese mixture and quickly and briefly beat to combine.