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Can Baking Powder Replace Corn Starch?

By [Frederick Reese](#), eHow Contributor, last updated July 28, 2013

Cornstarch is an essential ingredient in a well-stocked pantry. Made of the ground endosperm of corn, the flour-like substance offers superior thickening ability to all-purpose flour without the need to cook it for a long time to remove the starchy flavor. It also doesn't clump as easily as flour when you add it to a [cold](#) mixture. As an anti-caking agent, cornstarch is present in confectioner's sugar. Since it is gluten free, cornstarch can help add some structure to a baked good while increasing its tenderness. It is also often added to all-purpose flour to lower the protein content, creating a substitute for cake flour to produce a softer cake. Cornstarch also gels translucent, so it is great for thickening fruit and vegetable sauces. However, if you have a recipe that calls for cornstarch but realize that you don't have any on hand, you might wonder if you can substitute baking powder: The short answer is "no."



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Understanding Baking Powder

Even though they look similar, cornstarch and baking powder are two vastly different products. Baking powder is actually a blend of two chemicals: a weak alkali -- usually baking soda -- and a weak acid -- usually cream of tartar. While most commercial baking powders also have cornstarch or potato starch as an ingredient, this is just filler for dosing purposes and to prevent accidental activation in storage. When the alkali and the acid in the baking powder are exposed to moisture, they chemically react -- releasing a large amount of carbon dioxide.

Substituting Baking Powder for Cornstarch

Baking powder is a chemical leavener. When you mix it with water when making pancakes, waffles or breads, it creates bubbles that cause the cakes to rise.

If you use it as a substitute for cornstarch in a recipe, it is also likely to also cause bubbles -- and will not thicken your recipe as cornstarch does. Baking powder will make whatever you are cooking mildly alkaline, as sodium ions are released when the baking powder activates. This will directly affect the pH balance and may affect the rising and browning of your [food](#).

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Better than Baking Powder

There are better options than baking powder for replacing cornstarch. You can substitute all-purpose flour for cornstarch using a ratio of 2-to-1. However, keep in mind that flour will create a cloudier mixture that will require a longer cooking time. You can also substitute 1 tablespoon of tapioca powder for every 2 tablespoons cornstarch. Tapioca is actually preferred over cornstarch for chilled foods, as it is more stable in cold temperatures.

Additional Substitutes for Cornstarch

You substitute arrowroot for cornstarch using a 1-to-1 ratio. Arrowroot is preferred over cornstarch for dishes with more delicate flavors and refrigerated preparation. Arrowroot is also preferred for dishes with a long cooking time, as it is less likely to thin out with prolonged heat. You can also substitute rice or potato starch for cornstarch, using a 1-to-1 ratio for each. These starches work well for frozen foods. Konjac flour is non-gluten and doesn't contain sugar, making it a good substitution choice for diabetics. It actually thickens better than cornstarch. You can substitute it using a 1-to-1 ratio as well.

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