

The ultimate...

Milkshake

They are one of life's pleasures, so from the flavours to the toppings, don't hold back, says **Laura Goodman**

I don't believe silence and milkshakes are friends. Slurping a milkshake is a joyful act. It shows you're here, fully appreciating what it means to drink a blend of dairy products through a straw. To drink a milkshake, you should sit on a wall, your legs swinging back and forth. Or you should at least imagine yourself on that wall. Or you should imagine you're driving the Pacific Coast Highway in California, with the top down and your best songs on. Whatever you put in your milkshake, it should taste a bit like California.

We're not as good at doing things with abandon in the UK — and slurping definitely requires a little letting go. So, our cafes tend to serve milkshakes tentatively — thin with milk and unsweetened with syrup. And those newish high-street chains are fond of the "mix-in"; in other words, they chuck in a custard cream or a Lion bar and let it do the work.

In American diners, it's different. Even the vanilla milkshake is celebratory. It arrives in a tall glass, with the same quantity again served on the side in the silver cup it was blended in. I love this unapologetic approach — "Oops, we made twice as much as you needed. Go on, drink it. If you're too full to eat dinner, we really don't mind."

The classic recipe

Makes 1

250g vanilla ice cream
100ml milk
2 tsp vanilla extract (or the seeds of ½ vanilla pod)
1 tbsp Horlicks, to turn it into a malted vanilla shake (optional)
Whipped cream, to serve
1 glacé cherry, to serve

Take the ice cream out of the freezer and leave it to soften for a few minutes — it should be just beginning to melt at the edges.

Measure the milk, ice cream, vanilla and Horlicks, if using, straight into your blender and blend it all together until smooth. Top with some whipped cream and a glacé cherry.

The milk

Some say it has to be whole milk, and yes, it does seem counterintuitive to use skimmed. But these are thick shakes that rely heavily on ice cream — the milk is merely to loosen, so it doesn't really matter which one you use.



The ice cream

There are so many shades of vanilla ice cream these days. If you're adding vanilla from a pod, it will be stronger, so use an understated supermarket brand, but if you want to cut corners, try something flecked, such as Waitrose Seriously Creamy Madagascar Vanilla (£4 for 500ml). Beyond the vanilla, ice cream is the simplest way to change the flavour. Replace vanilla ice cream with chocolate, salted caramel, butterscotch, blackcurrant, pistachio, whatever you like.

For fruit shakes, you will get really bright flavours from sorbet, so for a raspberry shake, you might use 125g raspberry (or raspberry ripple) ice cream and 125g raspberry sorbet. You will get much truer results from sorbet than you would from syrup, that's for sure. Sainsbury's has a range of sorbets, including lemon, mango and raspberry (£2.50 for 500ml), and Ice Cream Union has tubs in passion fruit, mango and granny smith apple (£4.99 for 500ml; ocado.com).

The old favourites

Strawberry and banana shakes are best achieved with real fruit. Jam is another good way to berry things up a notch. Chocolate shakes are best made with good chocolate ice cream — go all out with Jude's Truly Chocolate (£3.19 for 500ml, from Waitrose). For peanut butter shakes (traditional in America, if not here), add 2-3 tbsp of the smooth stuff to the classic recipe (and then strawberry jam, if that's your...). A coffee shake is achieved with 1-2 tsp instant coffee.

The extra flavours

In those American diners, parlours and soda fountains, they will turn any shake into a malt using Carnation Malted Milk, but Horlicks is the original and does the job perfectly. After malt, there's booze to think about — consider adding amaretto to a chocolate shake, or rum to a banana one, or turn a vanilla shake into a white russian by replacing the milk with vodka and Kahlua.

If you ever need to sweeten your drink, use maple syrup, honey or condensed milk. You can get quite culinary with herbs and spices, too, such as chocolate-chilli, banana-nutmeg or strawberry-basil.

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The mix-ins

This is where things start to get silly. I don't necessarily condone it, but by all means throw in a KitKat, some cornflakes, a banoffee pie you made that went slightly sloppy overnight, or a leftover doughnut. You won't be the first.

The garnish

You can't fault the classic look of a cherry on top, but only about 50% of us care to eat them. Add your cream as normal, but then consider a new topper: hundreds and thousands, grated chocolate, Reese's Pieces, pretzel crumbs, toasted coconut, chopped hazelnuts, or a simple strawberry. Or replace the cream with toasted marshmallows.

The blend

Depending on how many bits and bobs have found their way into your drink, it can be a good idea to make a milky paste before introducing the ice cream. So with a PB-pretzel shake, for example, you would add broken pretzels and peanut butter to your milk and blend well. Then you would add the ice cream and give the whole thing a cursory blast, so as not to break it down too much (maybe even pulse it, if you've got a really enthusiastic blender). If you like your shake icy, rather than silky, you can add ice cubes during that primary phase.

The twists

- Replace some of the milk with cream cheese or mascarpone, and throw in a handful of strawberries — you just made a strawberry cheesecake milkshake and your guests are delighted.
- Make your fruit shakes taste more like pudding by roasting the fruit first with a little demerara sugar and butter. Strawberries, cherries, apples and peaches work well.
- The lines between shake and smoothie are blurry already — don't be afraid to blend them into oblivion by introducing yoghurt or sour cream for tang. ■