

Diet Friend or Foe?

Are you frustrated because even though you cut out junk food and fill up on healthy foods you're not losing weight? You could be misinterpreting what "healthy" really is. Some seemingly nutritious foods are full of calories, fat, and/or sugar. Below are some commonly misunderstood foods, along with healthier suggestions. Remember, all foods can fit into a healthy diet, but some deserve the spotlight while others should only make guest appearances.

Nutrition Bars (Granola, Cereal, Protein, Meal Bars)

They sound wholesome, but many bars have added fat, are dipped in sugary syrups or coated in chocolate, making them a glorified candy bar. Some bars are low in calories and fat, but are also low in nutrition, supplying only a little protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals.

Healthier Alternative: The best bars have less than 2 grams of saturated fat and at least 2 grams of fiber per serving. If you're looking for a snack, choose a bar that has less than 200 calories; if you want a meal replacement, keep the calories under 350 and aim for at least 7 grams of protein.

Muffins

Despite healthy sounding names like oat bran, banana nut, or low-fat blueberry, muffins are the morning equivalent of a cupcake. These morning delights are loaded with fat and sugar, and the giant portion sizes means that one muffin can pack in 500 calories and 25 grams of fat or more! **Healthier Alternative:** If you must have a muffin, either choose a small or split a large one with someone else. Better yet, make your own healthy recipe at home or replace the sugary muffin with a whole grain English muffin spread with a thin layer of peanut butter and low sugar jelly.

Bagels

Bagels themselves aren't evil, it's their size and what you put on them. Most store-bought bagels have 250-300 calories, while bakery bagels can easily contain 400 or 500 calories – and that's before you top it with cream cheese, butter or jelly. Tack on an additional 150-200 calories for your favorite spread, and soon this "healthy" bagel isn't any better than a donut.

Healthier Alternative: If you can't give up you're a.m. bagel, just watch your portion size. The correct portion is the size of a hockey puck. If only large bagels are available, eat one half, spread with a little peanut butter and banana slices.

Granola

How can something made with oats, dried fruit, and nuts be unhealthy? Most granola cereals have sugar, syrups and fat added to them, making them sky-high in calories, fat and sugar. In fact a bowl of granola with milk or yogurt can contain 600 calories and 30 grams of sugar. **Healthier Alternative:** Not all granolas are unhealthy, but you have to look at the label to be sure – sugar should not be one of the first few ingredients. Or you can make your own. You can also have a whole-grain flaked cereal instead, which is much lower in calories, fat and sugar. If you love granola too much to give it up, try sprinkling a couple tablespoons into

a lower calorie cereal or on top of your yogurt.

Fruit Smoothies

Smoothies are touted for their “all natural” or “fresh” ingredients, but they aren’t always as healthy as they seem. Need proof? Smoothies can easily have over 500 calories, with some containing over 1000, thanks to large serving sizes or the addition of high fat and high sugar ingredients like frozen yogurt, sherbet, juices and syrups. Not only do you get way too many calories, you will be getting a huge sugar rush and subsequent energy crash. **Healthier Alternative:** If you’re at a smoothie shop, ask for yours to be made with yogurt rather than frozen yogurt or sherbet, and fruit instead of fruit juice. And don’t forget to watch your portion size – try to stick with the 16oz. If you make smoothies at home, use ingredients that are low in calories, fat and sugar, such as skim milk, fresh or frozen fruit and nonfat yogurt. Create a variety of smoothies using a standard recipe of 1/2 cup skim milk, 1 cup of fruit, 1/2 to 3/4 cup nonfat yogurt and 3 to 5 ice cubes.

Tuna salad

Commercially made tuna sandwiches can contain up to 700 calories and 40 grams of fat. Plain tuna fish, both fresh and canned in water, is very healthy, but when it’s drenched in mayo, which has 100 calories per tablespoon, it’s easy to go overboard on calories and fat. **Healthier Alternative:** If you’re at a deli, you’re better off having a turkey, ham, or roast beef sandwich (ask for mustard instead of mayo) for a protein packed, low-fat sandwich. If you want the tuna sandwich, make your own with a little low-fat mayo, balsamic vinaigrette or low-fat Italian dressing. Add in celery, onion, or pickle relish for added crunch.

Pretzels

They may be lower in calories and fat than potato chips, but they’re not high on nutrition, either. They don’t provide much, if any, fiber, and not much for vitamins and minerals. They won’t fill you up, so you’ll eat a lot to satisfy your hunger so you’ll be reaching for more food soon after. And they’re high in sodium, so eating large portions will rack up your salt intake quick. **Healthier Alternative:** If you must have pretzels, opt for a whole grain variety or pair them with protein, such as peanut butter or a glass of low-fat milk to keep you full longer. Or have some low-fat, high fiber popcorn or a handful of nuts (fiber, protein, heart-healthy fat).

Energy Drinks

With an assortment of vitamins, minerals and herbs these drinks claim to boost energy, improve concentration, and more. It sounds amazing, but the energy boost you feel is likely due to the caffeine and sugar in these drinks, and all of those miracle herbs are merely marketing ploys. The truth is, energy drinks are just expensive coffees or sodas. **Healthier Alternative:** If you’re lacking energy, try to improve your lifestyle – eat a nutritious diet, be physically active, and get plenty of rest. These things will have a larger impact on your energy and performance than any energy drink. For those times when you’re dragging reach for black coffee or unsweetened tea. They offer caffeine to give you a boost, provide antioxidants and are wallet friendly.

Multi-Grain and Wheat Bread

Multi-grain, 7-Grain and Harvest Wheat sound like safe bets, but they may not be any healthier than white bread. These breads can be made with refined grains, which means you're missing out on the nutritional benefits of whole grains, such as more fiber.

Healthier Alternative: To make sure bread is made from whole-grains, read the ingredients list. The first ingredient should be preceded by the word "whole" or "whole grain" (e.g. whole wheat, whole grain corn). Oats are also whole grain.