

Healthy Foods that Aren't So Healthy

Things aren't always as good as they appear in the American supermarket and restaurant. Here's ten food items that don't always deserve their healthy reputation:

Yogurt. Yes, plain yogurt is a great high-calcium food, but it tastes like sour milk. And that's because it is sour milk. So the food manufacturers add "fruit on the bottom," which is really more like fruit preserves or jelly than real fruit. That gives you a food that often has 5-10 teaspoons of sugar per serving. What I do is buy one large container of plain non-fat yogurt and mix it with one large container of non-fat vanilla yogurt. That cuts the sugar per serving significantly from the "fruit added" kind but still gives you a product that tastes good.

Fish. Yes, fish is a great food for our health, but not *fast food* fish. Not only is it deep-fried but as a result, it can contain those bad trans fats. A *fast food* fish sandwich is usually made of cod, which contains hardly any of those good omega-3 fats for which fish is famous. A McDonalds Filet-O-Fish sandwich contains around 16 grams of fat. Their regular hamburger only contains 9. You could almost have two hamburgers. By the way, commercially-made tuna fish salad is a dietitian's nightmare. If you make it at home, you can hopefully go easy with a lower-fat mayonnaise. But when it's made for you, it's usually full-fat mayonnaise. A typical restaurant tuna sandwich has 700 calories and 43 grams of fat. Ouch!

Organic Food. There are now federal standards that require organic foods to be grown under very strict conditions. That's good news for the consumer. It usually means much less exposure to pesticides and preservatives; however, just

because a food says “organic” on the label doesn’t mean it’s healthy. Not only do you pay more for organic, there’s still nothing healthy about organic potato chips or “all natural” candy bars. You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear and you can’t make a healthy food out of an unhealthy one just because it’s grown under organic conditions.

Muffins. Now it’s true that if you make muffins at home, control the amount of sugar and fat and use whole grain flour, they can be good for you. Somehow commercially-made muffins got a health food reputation they don’t deserve. What are muffins? White flour, sugar, and fat. What are donuts? White flour, sugar, and fat. Muffins just have more. Have you seen the size of some of these muffins you can buy? They’re huge and usually cost a lot more than a donut. Bottom line? Muffins are donuts for rich people.

Frozen “Diet” entrees. While Lean Cuisine and Weight Watchers tend to be lower in calories and fat, their sodium levels can be high and the portion size is on the small side. Do they really fill you up? It’s no bargain if you’re hungry two hours later. If you use them for convenience, at least have them with a small salad and/or some whole grain bread or pasta to help fill you up. A piece of fruit would be a good dessert as well.

Olive Oil and Canola Oil. Yes, those are the oils you should be using. They’re low in saturated fat and high in the good monounsaturated. Of course, since they come from plants, they have no cholesterol. But remember when it comes to calories, fat is fat is fat. You can gain weight on any fat, whether it’s lard or olive

oil. The difference is that lard will clog your arteries and olive oil won’t. All fat has the same number of calories per unit volume of food. The problem is that a lot of people think they can start frying everything in olive and canola oil since they’re healthy oils. But that misses the point that Americans

still are eating too much fat. The average American eats about 82 grams of fat a day. A better target is around 50 grams for adults, both men and women. Use olive and canola oil, but that doesn't give you license to eat unlimited amounts.

Tea. No question that brewed tea contains antioxidants and other phytonutrients that are good for your health. Unfortunately, bottled tea drinks like those made by Snapple and Arizona Tea often contain very little actual tea and can contain lots of sugar or artificial sweetener. Researchers have found that freshly-brewed tea can have 10 to 100 times more antioxidants than these bottled teas. Brew your own tea or choose one that lists brewed tea as the first ingredient and no more than 4 grams of sugar per serving.

Energy/Sports Bars. Unless you're a high-level athlete, you probably don't need these. They can come in handy right after an intense workout to help you replenish muscle glycogen, but the average American doesn't work out that hard. They can also give you some protein; however, most of us get twice the protein we need everyday already. They also have vitamins, but you get a much better deal from a regular daily vitamin supplement that you're probably already taking. Oh, and they also can have lots of sugar and fat and may run around 200-400 calories each. Are they better than a candy bar? Yes! And, have you noticed they are a lot more expensive?

Juice. Drinking juice is NOT the same as eating the fruit or vegetable. First of all, the fiber—one of the benefits of eating whole foods—is lost. The processing of the fruit into its juice may cause the loss of some nutrient content as well. Many commercially available "fruit drinks" are not much more than soda without the bubbles. They're high in sugar or corn syrup, flavors, and contain very little, if any, real juice. Drinking a "100% real juice" beverage is better than getting no fruit or vegetables at all; better yet is to eat the whole food. I've found that people don't like to commit to a whole apple or orange, but if you slice it up, they seem

more likely to eat them.

Turkey Burger. When you're eating out, this seems like it would be the natural choice over a greasy hamburger. It turns out a typical restaurant turkey burger has 850 calories and a whopping 50 grams of fat. Why? Turkey is indeed a very low-fat meat. So low, in fact, that they add the skin back so that you can make a burger or loaf out of it. Without the fat from the skin, it tends to just fall apart. Then there's the mayo, and probably some cheese to top off your turkey burger. When you go shopping, what you want to buy is ground turkey *breast*, not ground turkey. You'll be happiest with it if you use crumbled up, such as in tacos, chili, or added to spaghetti. One serving of ground turkey has 17 grams of fat; one serving of ground turkey breast, only 1 gram.

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