



PUZZLING FOODS

There is so much information online, on TV, and in magazines today about foods and health that it can seem like you are stuck in a hopeless maze of contradiction. So you may ask:

- What should I eat? How much? Is it safe for me?
- Should I use butter or margarine? Okay, which margarine should I buy? Can I use as much “healthy oil” as I want? What oils are the best for me? Do they use those oils at the restaurants where I dine?
- There is an epidemic of cancer out there! Do I need supplements? Should I choose only organically grown fruits and vegetables?
- What should I drink? Coffee, tea, sugar-free sodas, tap water, bottled water, sports drinks....?
- Are eggs good or bad for me? Can I eat cheese? What kind?
- There’s an epidemic of diabetes among many younger people these days. To reduce my risk, do I have to avoid sugar and carbs?
- Potatoes are a high carb food, but I love to eat them. How bad are they for me?
- I’m supposed to eat more fish, but I only like it breaded and fried. Do the benefits outweigh the extra calories?

FATS

There are many food marketing campaigns in competition, touting their product as the one that will save your heart and health. Here’s the ‘skinny’:

- A healthy diet includes at least one tablespoon daily of essential fatty acids. These come from sources like canola, soybean, olive, and other polyunsaturated & mono-unsaturated vegetable oils.
- Fat supplies 9 calories per gram. It is recommended that 20-35% of your calories come from fat, which translates to 45-78 total fat grams in a day for someone consuming 2000 calories. Fats are a concentrated form of energy / calories.
- Aim to minimize your intake of “*trans*” and “saturated” fatty acids. Read nutrient labels and limit foods with “hydrogenated” oils. Hydrogenation involves a process of transforming liquid vegetable oils into a spreadable or “shortening” consistency. *Trans* fat and saturated fat are linked to higher low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, lower high density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol and other heart disease risk factors.
- Canola oil is low in saturated fat and olive oil contains medium-chain fatty acids. These fatty acids are associated with lower triglyceride and LDL cholesterol levels. Incorporate these and a variety of other vegetable oils in your diet, along with foods like nuts, avocado and flaxseed-containing products.

CHEESE

- Cheeses are popular among many ethnic and geographical regions, including the United States. They can contribute high quality protein, calcium, phosphorus, zinc, vitamin A, riboflavin and B-12 to our diets.
- Per ounce, whole milk cheeses contain 6-10 grams fat, of which 4-6 grams are saturated. They also have a total of 100-120 calories. U.S. cheese consumption has tripled over the past 30 years.
- If you enjoy cheeses, it's a moderation issue. When possible, choose cheeses with more protein and less fat per ounce, such as mozzarella, parmesan and provolone. Look for "low-fat", "skim", or "2% milk cheeses". One ounce of cheese is about the size of a pair of dice. When using cheese as a garnish, use a finely grated cheese with a light hand.

FISH

- Some fish, such as salmon, sardines, tuna and cod, are generally high in protein and is also rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3 fatty acids are associated with many health benefits, including protection against heart disease.
- Danger of mercury toxicity and other contaminants runs highest in shark, swordfish, golden bass, golden snapper and mackerel.
- Grilled, baked, steamed or broiled fish filets can be easily seasoned with herbs and spices, cooked quickly, and offer a more nutrient-dense option. Breaded and fried fish offers less protein and more fat, carbs and salt.

DRIED FRUIT

- They come in handy as snacks because they can be taken "on the go" and are compact. However, they can be a source of tooth decay because the concentrated natural sugar and low water content allow particles to stick to teeth. These may not be as good of an option for children or for extended snacking periods unless followed by a toothbrush.
- Dehydrated fruits are concentrated packages of energy and other nutrients. Example: one mini box of raisins (0.5 oz) contains 42 calories; 10 fresh grapes (1.7 oz) contains 34 calories.
- While companies boast about the high nutrient and antioxidant content of dried fruit, they are still very concentrated in calories and carbs. Be portion conscious and read labels to spot unwanted additional ingredients like sugar.

EGGS

- Nicely packaged, one large egg offers about 7 grams protein, 5 grams fat and 75 calories
- Eggs are identified as the "gold standard" for bio-availability of dietary protein. All other proteins are assigned a score relative to egg protein, which has a score of 100 (i.e. egg protein, when cooked, is well used by the body)
- As a protein source, eggs are comparatively inexpensive (per ounce). They also serve as a foundational protein source in the vegetarian diet.
- One egg yolk contains approximately 213 mg of dietary cholesterol. General recommendations remain at 300 mg dietary cholesterol per day. Therefore, limit the other sources of cholesterol in your diet when you enjoy an egg, or use 2 egg whites in place of one whole egg when possible. Notable, is the fact that lecithin (a natural fat emulsifier) is in the egg yolk.

AVOCADOS

- Sometimes referred to as the “butter pear”, a medium-sized avocado supplies 30 grams of fat (equal to fat in a “quarter pounder” burger but much better in the type of fat contained).
- Most of the fat is mono-unsaturated and contains oleic acid. These have been found to lower LDL (“bad”) cholesterol and triglycerides.
- Avocados are rich in phytonutrients, including beta-sitosterol, (found to lower blood cholesterol), lutein and other related carotenoids. Phytonutrients may contribute to lowered risk of oral and prostate cancers.
- 1 cup of avocado (1 small fruit) offers 35% of your recommended dietary allowance (RDA) for Vitamin K, 28% of dietary fiber, and 19-25% of copper, vitamin C, Vitamin B-6 and folate.
- Used creatively, the avocado can provide health benefits to your diet. Instead of cream cheese on a bagel, try some mashed avocado. Instead of mayo on a sandwich, add a few thin slices of avocado.

SPORTS DRINKS

- These may be appropriate for anyone doing moderate exercise for more than 90 minutes at a time. Excessive fluid loss through sweat, accompanied by electrolyte losses and depletion of carbohydrate stores (primarily glycogen) make the sports drinks a sensible option.
- Water is the better, cheaper option for anyone exercising for less than 90 minutes at a time. Push the fluids if you are perspiring, but reserve sports drinks for bouts of intense and extended physical exertion.

NUTS

- The word has gotten out that nuts are a primary source of fat in our diets. Creamy, high fat peanut butter comes from.... ground peanuts! If you need to keep an eye on your total calorie consumption for the day, limit nuts or replace other fats with nuts.
- A variety of nuts are being identified as containing many beneficial components such as fat-soluble vitamins, some omega-3 fatty acids, phytonutrients, minerals, plant proteins and fiber.
- Because of their low carb content, they contribute very little to blood sugar (unless “honey roasted”). They are also easily carried as snacks in small packaging, Do not eat nuts if they have a strong, rancid smell. Fats do go rancid, so keep them well sealed and toss old nuts.
- Nuts are a high allergy-risk food. Severe reactions can occur in people with nut allergies. Foods containing nuts need to be clearly identified for guests.

POTATOES

- Potatoes are the number one vegetable crop in the world and available year round. They are a staple in the American diet and considered to be a comfort food by many.
- Potatoes have been given bad press as a high carb, white starch food. Potato chips, fries, and “loaded” baked potatoes (especially without the skins) have indeed contributed to our epidemic of obesity in America. It is, however, important to keep in mind that potatoes still offer many

benefits when prepared without excessive fats and processing.

- Potatoes are a rich source of potassium, vitamins C and B-6, copper, manganese, tryptophan and dietary fiber. A medium baked potato with the skin (2 1/4-3 1/4" diameter) provides 154 calories, 58.6 grams carbohydrates, 4 grams dietary fiber, 4.5 grams protein and 0.2 grams fat.

Additional Reading & Resources

- <http://www.eatright.org>
- <http://www.nutrition4texas.org>
- <http://healthytiger.blogspot.com/2007/11/food-label-confusion.html>
- <http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/full/71/6/1682s> (The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition)
- Bowes & Church's Food Values of Portions Commonly Used.. 18th edition. By Jean Penington & Judith S. Douglass. Pub: Lippincot. Williams & Wilkins. 2005.
- http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/nutrition_350_ENU_HTML.htm
- <http://www.montana.edu/news/1102434157.html>
- <http://www.ific.org/publications/factsheets/preprobioticsfs.cfm>