

# Nutrition Action

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HEALTH LETTER  
CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

## MULTI DILEMMA

### Should you take one?

BY DAVID SCHARDT &amp; STEPHANIE SCARMO

“Is it true that a large study found that most vitamin supplements may actually do more harm than good?” asked the Mayo Clinic in a syndicated column in the *Chicago Tribune* in January. “Don’t Take Your Vitamins,” warned the Op Ed in *The New York Times* in June.

That might have come as a surprise to those who saw this headline in the *Times* the previous October: “Multivitamin Use Linked to Lowered Cancer Risk.”

Millions of Americans take a multivitamin every day. To most people, a multi is insurance against a less-than-perfect diet.

Are they helping or hurting themselves?

*Continued on page 3.*





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# MULTI DILEMMA

## Should you take one?



“Breast health,” “heart health,” “immune health,” says Target’s Up & Up Women’s Daily Multivitamin. “Energy support,” “prostate health,” “fights cell aging,” says GNC Mega Men.

Sounds like taking a multi may lower your risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke, and more. Yet a handful of headlines have made multivitamins sound dangerous.

In fact, few studies have found that a multi can lower or raise the risk of disease. But they may be worth taking anyway.

### A SHORTER LIFE?

When an Op Ed last June in *The New York Times* warned readers, “Don’t Take Your Vitamins,” it wasn’t referring to multivitamins like Centrum or One A Day. Instead, Philadelphia physician Paul Offit cautioned that high doses of antioxidants like vitamin E and beta-carotene could raise the risk of cancer and heart disease.

“I think multivitamins don’t hurt you,” Offit told CNN, though he added that he didn’t believe people needed a multi.

The Mayo Clinic had a different take. In a large study of older Midwestern women, noted Mayo’s column in the *Chicago Tribune* in January, “taking a multivitamin appeared to increase risk of premature death.”

In the Iowa Women’s Health Study, those who reported taking a daily multivitamin were 6 percent more likely to die over a 19-year period than those who said that they didn’t take a multi.<sup>1</sup>

“You want to be very careful in interpreting the results from observational studies,” cautions Eric Jacobs, an epidemiologist at the American Cancer Society in Atlanta.

An observational study *watches* people. In the Iowa Women’s Health Study, for example, researchers gave the women a questionnaire asking what they ate, how often they exercised, what supplements they took, and more. Then the researchers waited for 19 years to see which women

got which diseases or died.

But an observational study can’t tell whether taking a multi *caused* any illness or death. Those who chose to take a multivitamin may have differed in some way from those who didn’t take a multi.

“Sometimes people start taking multivitamins because they feel sick or low in energy,” notes Jacobs. “They may be more



Supplement makers need little evidence to make claims like these.

likely to die prematurely for reasons unrelated to their multivitamin use.”

Or the opposite can happen. “Multivitamin users tend to have healthier lifestyles,” says Jacobs. “So if they have a lower risk of disease, that may be the reason, not their multivitamin use.”

To get at cause and effect, researchers randomly assign people to take either a multivitamin or a lookalike but inactive

placebo. Since all the people are drawn from the same pool, the only difference between the groups in a randomized controlled trial is that one is taking a multi and one isn’t.

“Randomized controlled trials are a better way of judging the impact of taking a multivitamin,” says Jacobs.

In the largest and longest randomized controlled trial of multivitamins, the Physicians’ Health Study II, more than 14,000 men took either Centrum Silver (a basic multivitamin-and-mineral for people 50 and older) or a placebo every day for 11 years.<sup>2,3</sup>

“The risk of dying was not significantly different between men taking multivitamins versus men taking the placebo,” says Harvard epidemiologist Howard Sesso, who led the study.

### A LOWER RISK OF DISEASE?

Will a multivitamin cut your risk of disease? For heart disease and stroke, the answer appears to be no.

“In the Physicians’ Health Study II, we found no evidence overall that taking a multi for more than a decade prevented heart attacks or strokes any more than taking a placebo,” says Sesso. “But it didn’t increase risk, either.”

That’s consistent with the results of most observational studies. In the Multi-ethnic Cohort Study and the Women’s Health Initiative cohort, for example, people who said that they took a multivitamin were no more or less likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke than those who said that they didn’t take one.<sup>4,5</sup> Nor did they have a lower or higher risk of cancer.

That’s why the Physicians’ Health Study II made big news last year.

“Men taking a multivitamin were 8 percent less likely than men taking a placebo to be diagnosed with a cancer,” says Sesso. About half of the cancers diagnosed





## What Your MULTI Should Contain

Vitamin A	No more than 5,000 IU (including any % as beta-carotene)
Vitamin C	60-1,000 mg
Vitamin D	400 IU or more
Vitamin E	20-100 IU
Vitamin K	10 mcg or more
Thiamin (B-1)	1.2 mg or more
Riboflavin (B-2)	1.7 mg or more
Niacin (B-3)	14-35 mg
Vitamin B-6	2-100 mg
Folic Acid	No more than 400 mcg
Vitamin B-12	6 mcg or more
Calcium	Don't rely on a multi <sup>1</sup>
Iron	
Premenopausal women	18 mg
Everyone else	No more than 10 mg
Magnesium	50-350 mg
Zinc	No more than 30 mg
Copper	0.5-10 mg
Selenium	20-110 mcg
Chromium	35 mcg or more
Potassium	Don't rely on a multi

<sup>1</sup> **Men:** Your multi should have no more than around 250 mg of calcium.

**Note:** "Or more" doesn't mean that a nutrient is safe at any dose, but that levels in multivitamins are unlikely to be high enough to cause harm.

during the 11-year study were of the prostate, almost all of them the indolent, slow-growing kind that don't necessarily need treatment (see *Nutrition Action*, Sept. 2013, cover story). Taking a multi had no impact on them.

And the lower risk for other kinds of cancer wasn't statistically significant for any specific cancer.

"That may have been primarily because there weren't enough cases to detect significant differences," says Sesso. (A study may not have enough power to see a statistically significant difference if only a small number of people are diagnosed with, say, bladder or colorectal cancer.)

But it's also possible that the lower risk of cancer in multi takers was due to chance.

"The fact that there wasn't a clear reduction in risk for any specific cancer raises a question about whether multivitamins had an impact at all," says the American Cancer Society's Eric Jacobs.

How might a multivitamin prevent cancer? "It may mimic the dietary patterns we try to recommend, such as an increased intake of fruits and vegetables that are rich in a variety of nutrients," says Sesso.

And that raises the question: Is it worth taking a multivitamin to make up for what we don't get from our diets?

### Cheap Insurance?

"We know that even people who make a concerted effort to add more nutrient-dense foods to their diets still might not be meeting their nutrient requirements," says Diane McKay, an assistant professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University in Boston.

In 2000, in a study sponsored by a California supplement company, McKay and her colleagues randomly assigned 80 healthy, well-nourished adults who were living in the Boston area to take either a standard multi or a placebo for two months.<sup>6</sup>

"Even in these healthy people, we found a significant boost in the blood levels of certain nutrients up to levels that are associated with a lower risk of disease," says McKay.

The percentage of multi takers with suboptimal vitamin D levels, for example, dropped from 7 percent to 0 percent, and the percentage with suboptimal vitamin B-12 fell from 42 percent to 27 percent.

McKay's bottom line: "Taking a multivitamin formulated at about 100 percent of the Daily Value for vitamins and minerals can be a pretty convenient and cost-effective way of filling in the gaps that may exist between what you need and what you're actually consuming."

In 2010, the U.S. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee identified seven "shortfall nutrients of public health concern": vitamin B-12, vitamin D, folic acid, iron, calcium, potassium, and fiber.

Multivitamins aren't a good source of

## The Best Multi List

Here's a selection of multivitamins from some major brands that meet our criteria, plus a few that just miss for reasons that don't matter (see footnotes). If yours isn't on the list, don't panic; we didn't look at every multi. You can check any label against our "What Your Multi Should Contain" list.

### Men & Postmenopausal Women

Centrum Men Under 50\*<sup>1</sup>  
 Centrum Silver Adults 50+  
 Centrum Silver Men 50+  
 CVS Daily Multiple Tablets for Men  
 CVS Spectravite Adult 50+ Multivitamin  
 Equate Complete Multivitamin Adults 50+  
 Equate Complete Multivitamin Men's 50+  
 Equate Complete Multivitamin Women's 50+\*  
 Equate One Daily Men's Health  
 Nature Made Multi for Her 50+  
 Nature Made Multi for Him  
 Nature Made Multi for Him 50+  
 Nature's Bounty ABC Plus Senior  
 Nutrilite Daily Multivitamin Multimineral\*  
 One A Day Men's 50+ Healthy Advantage<sup>2</sup>  
 One A Day Men's Health Formula  
 One A Day Women's 50+ Healthy Advantage<sup>2</sup>  
 Target Up & Up Adults' Multivitamins  
 Walgreens A thru Z Select Multivitamin

\* Contains 6 or 8 mg of iron (other multis in the list have no iron).

<sup>1</sup> Contains 1.3 mg of riboflavin.

<sup>2</sup> Contains 117 mcg of selenium

### Premenopausal Women

Centrum Adults Under 50  
 CVS Daily Multiple Tablets for Women  
 CVS Spectravite Ultra Women's Multivitamin<sup>1</sup>  
 Equate Complete Multivitamin Adults Under 50  
 Equate One Daily Women's Health<sup>2</sup>  
 Kirkland Signature Daily Multi  
 Nature Made Multi Complete  
 Nature's Bounty ABC Plus  
 Nature's Bounty Multi-Day Plus Minerals  
 Nature's Bounty Multi-Day Women's<sup>2</sup>  
 One A Day Women's  
 Sundown Advanced Formula SunVite  
 Sundown Naturals Complete Daily with Iron  
 Target Up & Up Multivitamin  
 Target Up & Up Women's Daily Multivitamin<sup>2</sup>  
 Walgreens One Daily for Women<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Contains 25 mcg of chromium.

<sup>2</sup> Contains 10 mg of niacin.

fiber, potassium, or calcium, which are too bulky to fit into a multi. But a multivitamin can provide close to—or all of—a day's worth of the other four.

■ **Iron.** From 7 to 16 percent of women aged 12 to 49 are iron deficient. Many multis contain the Daily Value (18 milli-

grams), which is the recommended level for premenopausal women. Men and postmenopausal women need only about 8 to 10 mg.

■ **Vitamin B-12.** Adults 50 years and older should get the Recommended Dietary Allowance (2.4 micrograms) mainly from fortified foods or a supplement, says the Institute of Medicine.

That's because an estimated 10 to 30 percent of older adults don't make enough stomach acid to separate the B-12 from protein in foods. You don't need stomach acid to absorb the B-12 in supplements and fortified foods because it isn't bound to protein.

Vegans (who eat no dairy, eggs, seafood, poultry, or meat) should also get B-12 from a multi or fortified food because plant foods have no B-12. A vitamin B-12 deficiency can lead to irreversible nerve damage and dementia.

■ **Vitamin D.** "Our body's ability to convert sunlight into active vitamin D declines as we get older," notes Tufts University's McKay. And in the winter, sunlight lacks the UV rays that make vitamin D unless you live as far south as Atlanta or Los Angeles. That and the fact that few foods are rich in vitamin D means that many people have less-than-optimal blood levels.

The Institute of Medicine recommends 600 IU a day of vitamin D for adults up to age 70 and 800 IU for those over 70. Most multivitamins have at least 400 IU.

Scientists are still investigating whether vitamin D may lower the risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, memory loss, depression, and more.

■ **Folic Acid.** Folate is a B vitamin that helps cells grow and divide. Folic acid is the form of folate that's added to foods and supplements. Women need the vitamin early in their pregnancy—often before they know that they're pregnant—to reduce the risk of spina bifida and other neural tube defects. (The incidence of spina bifida has dropped by 31 percent since 1998, when the Food and Drug Administration started requiring companies to add folic acid to most breads, pasta, rice, cereals, and other grains.)

But some researchers worry that too much folic acid from supplements, grains, and fortified breakfast cereals may harm people who unknowingly harbor precancerous or cancerous cells in their body.



Pants Adult Complete—6 gummies, costing about \$1—has two teaspoons of sugar and 50 calories but no vitamin B-2, vitamin K, selenium, chromium, iron, copper, magnesium, or calcium. And its 128 milligrams of the omega-3 fish oils DHA and EPA is what you'd get in about a tablespoon of salmon. Wow!

Smarty Pants Weight Management Complete gummies (6 a day, for about \$1.50 and also less than complete) feature 6 grams of inulin, "to create a feeling of fullness, promote digestive health and regularity." Yet in two studies, people who took 12 grams of inulin every day for one to three months felt no fuller, ate no less food, and lost no more weight than similar people who took a placebo.<sup>1,2</sup>

Looks like Smarty Pants could use some remedial education.

<sup>1</sup> *Br. J. Nutr.* 78: 215, 1997. <sup>2</sup> *Nutrition J.* 11: 44, 2012.

"If you've done studies in cells and in animals, as I have, you know that consuming too much folic acid can enhance the development of cancer," says Joel Mason, director of the Vitamins and Carcinogenesis Laboratory at the Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University.

"If you think about the role folate plays in the cell, helping to synthesize new cells, this makes eminent sense."

But a meta-analysis published earlier this year eased some of the fear. In 13 randomized controlled trials that included 50,000 people, those who took an average of 2,000 micrograms of folic acid every day for five years had no higher risk of any kind of cancer than those who got a placebo.<sup>7</sup> Most multivitamins have only one-fifth that much (400 mcg).

Mason is still uneasy. "It typically takes eight to 12 years for a tiny precancerous

bump in your colon to fully evolve into a true cancer," he says. "So it's possible that the trials weren't long enough to see the effects of folic acid on cancer risk."

Still, "the good news is that if folic acid does increase the risk of cancer, you'd have to take a fair bit for that to happen," notes Mason. "It's probably safe to take the folic acid in a single multivitamin each day."

The Institute of Medicine says that 1,000 micrograms of folic acid a day is the highest safe level adults can consume, because more than that can cover up a vitamin B-12 deficiency.

Americans get an average of about 270 mcg a day of folic acid from fortified grains (bread, pasta, rice, etc.) and breakfast cereals. But that average includes people who eat a cereal like Kellogg's Raisin Bran, which has 100 mcg of folic acid (the label says "25% DV") in every cup and those who eat All-Bran, which has 400 mcg ("100% DV" on the label) in every half cup.

"If you took a multivitamin in the morning, a B complex in the afternoon, and ate cereals and energy bars fortified with folic acid, you could exceed 1,000 micrograms of folic acid a day," says Mason. "That could mask a B-12 deficiency and possibly increase cancer risk."

## Bottom Line

■ It's worth taking a multivitamin if it supplies nutrients—like vitamins D and B-12—that you may not be getting enough of from your food.

■ Don't count on a multi to "support" your heart, breast, immune system, skin, colon, brain, or anything else.

■ You don't need to pay more than \$5 a month for a high-quality multi.

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Intern. Med.* 171:1625, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> *JAMA* 308:1871, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> *JAMA* 308:1751, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> *Am. J. Epidemiol.* 173: 906, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> *Arch. Intern. Med.* 169: 294, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> *J. Am. Coll. Nutr.* 19: 613, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> *Lancet* 381: 1029, 2013.

# HOW TO MULTIVITA

**T**his made-up multivitamin label shows how much of each vitamin and mineral we need to get every day (from foods and supplements combined), according to the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine (IOM). The IOM's Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) vary

**VITAMIN A.** Most multivitamins contain some combination of retinol (vitamin A) and beta-carotene (which our bodies convert to retinol). The outdated DV for vitamin A—5,000 IU from retinol and beta-carotene combined—is higher than the RDAs: 3,000 IU for men and 2,310 IU for women. High doses of beta-carotene (25,000 to 50,000 IU) increase the risk of lung cancer in smokers and, possibly, former smokers. (Beta-carotene from carrots and other foods is safe.) Too much retinol from supplements (10,000 IU or more) can cause birth defects in pregnant women. Look for a multi with no more than 5,000 IU of vitamin A (any combination of retinol and beta-carotene).

**VITAMIN D.** It helps prevent falls in older people and helps keep bones strong. A large trial is testing whether vitamin D prevents cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, memory loss, depression, and more. Our bodies make vitamin D from the sun's UV rays. A few foods (like salmon and tuna) contain D, which is added to others (like milk, breakfast cereals, and yogurt). Most multivitamins contain the outdated DV (400 IU), but the IOM recommends that adults get 600 IU a day (800 IU for those over 70). More than 4,000 IU a day may lead to dangerously high blood levels of calcium.

**THIAMIN (B-1), RIBOFLAVIN (B-2), NIACIN (B-3), B-6.** Don't expect them to make you energetic, but higher-than-DV levels are safe. Exceptions: taking 50 mg of niacin can cause flushing of the skin, and more than 100 mg of B-6 can cause (reversible) nerve damage and skin lesions.

**VITAMIN B-12.** People over 50 should get at least 2.4 micrograms a day of B-12 from supplements or fortified foods because they may not make enough stomach acid to absorb B-12 from meats, eggs, and dairy foods. Vegans (who eat no meat, dairy, or eggs) also need a supplement or fortified foods. A B-12 deficiency can cause anemia, dementia, and irreversible nerve damage. Most multivitamins contain the DV (6 mcg). Doses up to 1,000 or 2,000 mcg are safe.

**BIOTIN, PANTOTHENIC ACID.** Ignore. We get enough from our food.

**IRON.** Premenopausal women, who lose iron through menstruation, should get the DV (18 milligrams). High levels of iron stored in the body may increase the risk of heart disease, some cancers, and type 2 diabetes, though the evidence for all three is weak. To be safe, men and postmenopausal women should look for a multivitamin with no more than 10 mg of iron.

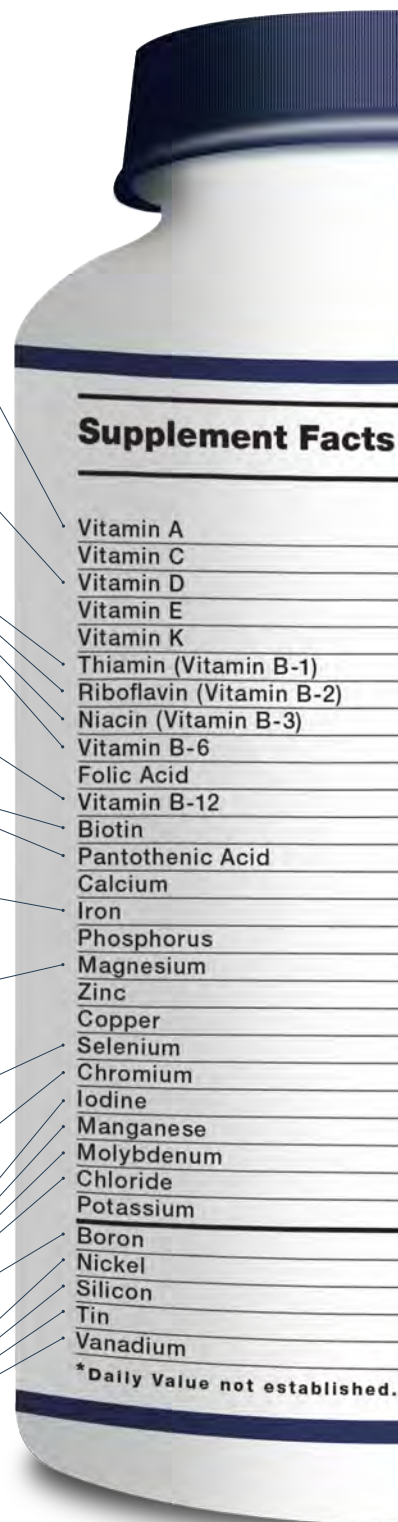
**MAGNESIUM.** About half of Americans get less magnesium than the IOM recommends. Low intakes may raise the risk of high blood pressure and diabetes. Taking more than 350 milligrams from supplements can cause diarrhea and stomach cramping. Nuts and whole grains are good sources, but you're best off loading up on leafy greens.

**SELENIUM.** The RDA is 55 micrograms, but Americans average twice that much from their food. Taking a supplement with 200 mcg or more may increase the risk of type 2 diabetes, so look for a multivitamin with no more than about 100 mcg.

**CHROMIUM.** Men need 30 to 35 micrograms a day, and women need 20 to 25 mcg. Taking up to the DV (120 mcg) is safe, but most multivitamins have less.

**IODINE, MANGANESE, MOLYBDENUM, CHLORIDE, BORON.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that many women aged 20 to 39 may not get enough iodine, which the developing brain needs during pregnancy. Everyone should aim for the DV (150 micrograms). Dairy foods and seafood are good sources. We get plenty of the other minerals from our food.

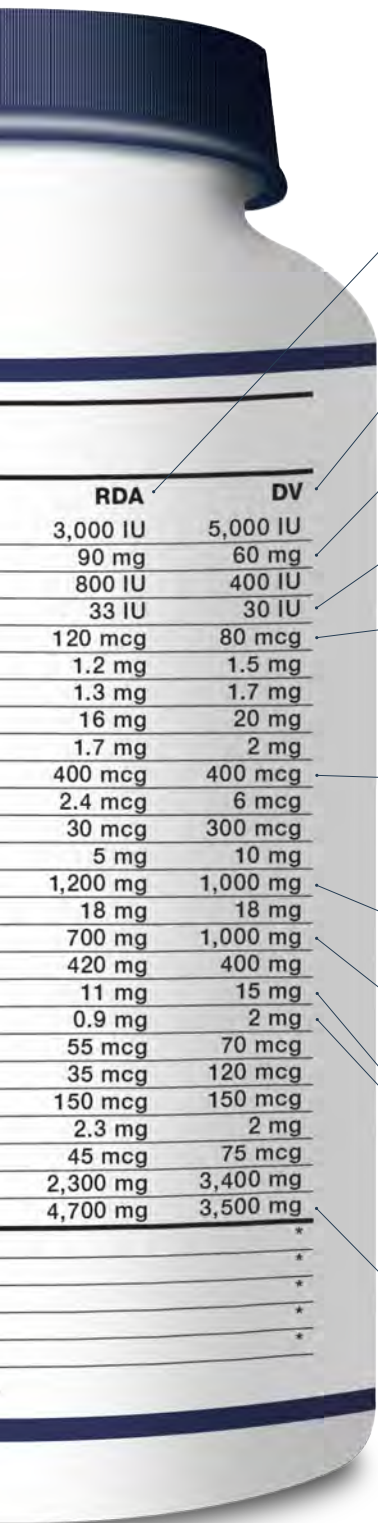
**NICKEL, SILICON, TIN, VANADIUM.** Ignore. It's not clear that we need them.





# MIN LABEL

slightly by age and gender. In most cases, we picked the highest level for adults, excluding pregnant and breastfeeding women. Multivitamin labels list the Daily Value (DV) for each nutrient, not the RDA. Some of the DVs are outdated.



RDA	DV
3,000 IU	5,000 IU
90 mg	60 mg
800 IU	400 IU
33 IU	30 IU
120 mcg	80 mcg
1.2 mg	1.5 mg
1.3 mg	1.7 mg
16 mg	20 mg
1.7 mg	2 mg
400 mcg	400 mcg
2.4 mcg	6 mcg
30 mcg	300 mcg
5 mg	10 mg
1,200 mg	1,000 mg
18 mg	18 mg
700 mg	1,000 mg
420 mg	400 mg
11 mg	15 mg
0.9 mg	2 mg
55 mcg	70 mcg
35 mcg	120 mcg
150 mcg	150 mcg
2.3 mg	2 mg
45 mcg	75 mcg
2,300 mg	3,400 mg
4,700 mg	3,500 mg

**RDA.** The Recommended Dietary Allowance is the Institute of Medicine’s recommendation for how much we should get every day (from food and supplements combined). The numbers shown here are for the adult group with the highest RDA, excluding pregnant and breastfeeding women. The RDAs, which don’t appear on supplement (or food) labels, are more up to date than the DVs.

**DV.** The Daily Value for each vitamin and mineral is set by the Food and Drug Administration. Some DVs are outdated and don’t reflect the latest recommendations (RDAs) from the Institute of Medicine. The DVs appear on supplement (and food) labels.

**VITAMIN C.** The outdated DV (60 milligrams) is lower than the RDA (90 mg a day for men and 75 mg for women). Smokers need an extra 35 mg. Most people get enough vitamin C from their diet. Taking more than 1,000 mg at one time can cause diarrhea.

**VITAMIN E.** Vitamin E supplements don’t prevent heart attacks or strokes, and in a large trial, men who took 400 IU a day for 5½ years had a slightly higher risk of prostate cancer. Most multivitamins contain the DV (30 IU). To play it safe, look for a multi with no more than 100 IU. Good sources include nuts, oils, whole grains, and leafy greens.

**VITAMIN K.** The IOM recommends 120 micrograms a day for men and 90 mcg for women. Most multivitamins have less than the DV (80 mcg), since vitamin K can interfere with blood-thinning drugs like warfarin (Coumadin). Look for a multi with 10 mcg or more. If you’re taking a blood thinner, check with your doctor before you start (or stop) taking a multivitamin with vitamin K. Leafy greens are the best source.

**FOLIC ACID.** Women who could become pregnant need 400 micrograms a day (the DV) to reduce the risk of birth defects like spina bifida. Too much folic acid can mask a vitamin B-12 deficiency, so look for a multivitamin with no more than 400 mcg. If the serving of breakfast cereal you typically eat has 400 mcg or more, consider taking your multi every other day. Nutrition Facts labels list folic acid as a percentage of the Daily Value (“%DV”), so you may have to do a little math.

**CALCIUM.** It helps keep bones strong and may help prevent colon cancer. Calcium is bulky, so multivitamins usually contain far less than the DV (1,000 milligrams). If you don’t get enough calcium from milk, yogurt, cheese, or fortified foods, consider taking a calcium supplement. Pre-menopausal women and men up to age 70 need 1,000 mg a day (from food and supplements combined), while postmenopausal women and men over 70 need 1,200 mg. Taking a daily supplement with 1,000 mg or more of calcium may raise the risk of constipation and kidney stones.

**PHOSPHORUS.** A multivitamin won’t have much, but most people get enough from their food. More than 4,000 milligrams of phosphorus a day can pull calcium out of bones.

**ZINC, COPPER.** Most multivitamins contain the DV for zinc (15 milligrams), but some have more. Too much zinc (more than 40 mg) can make it harder to absorb copper. That includes zinc from foods (like meat, poultry, seafood, dairy, and beans). In a large trial, people who took 80 mg of zinc a day for five years had a higher risk of urinary tract infections, an enlarged prostate, or (in women) stress incontinence. Look for a multi with no more than 30 mg of zinc and with 0.5 to 10 mg of copper.

**POTASSIUM.** Less than 2 percent of American adults get the recommended amount of potassium (4,700 milligrams a day), which can help lower blood pressure. Don’t count on a multi for help. They don’t contain much. And the potassium chloride in supplements won’t help prevent kidney stones and bone loss like the potassium citrate in fruits and vegetables. 🍌



Whole fruit beats juice.

## Fruit 2, Juice 0

Eating whole fruit may reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes, while drinking fruit juice may raise the risk. And whole fruit curbs appetite better than juice.

Researchers tracked roughly 150,000 female nurses and 36,000 male health professionals for 20 to 32 years. The risk of diabetes for those who said they drank fruit juice at least once a day was 21 percent higher than for those who drank juice less than once a week. In contrast, the risk for those who reported eating blueberries at least twice a

week was 23 percent lower than for those who ate blueberries less than once a week. The risk was roughly 18 percent lower for those who ate grapes and raisins, apples and pears, or bananas two to four times a week.

Neither the glycemic index (a measure of how high foods boost blood sugar) nor any particular flavonoid (potentially beneficial plant compounds) explained the links to diabetes risk.

In a second study, researchers fed 15 lean and 19 overweight or obese adults 400 calories' worth of apples and grapes in one of two forms: either 1¾ cups of apple juice and 1½ cups of grape juice or 1 Gala apple, ¼ cup of red grapes, ¼ cup of raisins, and ½ cup of dried apple. At a subsequent lunch, the participants, especially those who were overweight or obese, ate more calories after consuming the juice than after eating the whole fruit.

**What to do:** Shoot for five servings of fruit (each serving is 1 piece or ½ cup), not juice, every day. It's too early to say which fruits may prevent diabetes, so eat whatever kind you like.

*BMJ* 2013. doi:10.1136/bmj.f5001. *Int. J. Obesity* 37: 1109, 2013.

## Wrap It Up

Be aware of cues that make you munch.

One group of researchers studied roughly 60 female students in their 20s.

**Study 1.** The researchers gave each student a bowl of 20 individually wrapped or 20 unwrapped chocolate candies and told her to eat as much as she wanted. After 5 minutes, the students averaged about 5 pieces of unwrapped candy, but only about 3½ pieces of wrapped candy.

**Study 2.** In a similar experiment, the students ate 5 unwrapped candies that they could grab with their fingers, but only 3½ candies wrapped in transparent foil or unwrapped candies that they had to pick up using tongs.

A second group of scientists used choco-

lates to see if people are influenced by what others eat. They let 66 students relax in a room with a bowl of chocolates for 10 minutes (before taking a reaction test). When a bowl of wrappers was also present, 72 percent of the participants took a chocolate. When a bowl without wrappers was present, only 45 percent took a chocolate.

**What to do:** If you're trying not to snack, keep it wrapped up, out of arm's reach, or out of sight. And be aware that what others eat may affect how much you eat.

*Appetite* 71: 89, 2013. *Appetite* 70: 1, 2013.



## Vitamin D for Lungs?

Lung cancer kills more women than any other cancer. Although smoking is the biggest risk factor, half of lung cancers in women are not caused by smoking.

Scientists tracked nearly 129,000 postmenopausal women who participated in the Women's Health Initiative from 1993 to 2010. Among women who had never smoked, those who consumed at least 400 IU of vitamin D a day (from food and supplements combined) had a 45 percent lower risk of lung cancer than those who got less than 100 IU a day. The risk was 65 percent lower among never smokers who got at least 800 IU a day. Vitamin D wasn't linked to lung cancer risk in smokers or former smokers.

Vitamin D was more protective among women who spent no more than two hours a day outdoors in the summer, probably because the vitamin D that people consume matters less in those with more sun exposure.

**What to do:** It's too early to know if vitamin D can prevent lung cancer. To play it safe, consider taking a multivitamin or vitamin D supplement to make sure you get the Recommended Dietary Allowance, which is 600 IU a day up to age 70 and 800 IU if you're over 70.

*Am. J. Clin. Nutr.* 2013. doi:10.3945/ajcn.112.055905.

## Omega-3s & Hot Flashes

The omega-3 fats DHA and EPA don't appear to curb hot flashes in menopausal women, as earlier studies had suggested.

Researchers gave 355 women either a placebo or 1,800 mg of omega-3 fats including EPA (1,275 mg) and DHA (300 mg), the two key fats in fish oil. All the women had reported at least 14 hot flashes or night sweats—many bothersome or severe—per week.

The average number of hot flashes was 7.6 per day when the study began. After 12 weeks, the number dropped by about 2.5 per day in both groups. And those taking the omega-3s reported no better sleep or mood than those taking the placebo.

**What to do:** Don't rely on omega-3 fats to curb hot flashes. And keep in mind that any supplement, like a placebo, may make you feel better simply because you expect it to. 🍌

*Menopause* 2013. doi:10.1097/gme.0b013e31829e40b8.



# Decisions, Decisions...

**S**andwich or salad? Pasta or pizza? We've all been there. Here are our answers to questions that people often ask themselves when they eat out. In most cases, our numbers (they're from the chains' Web sites) hold up for similar restaurants.

## Which is better?

BY BONNIE LIEBMAN & JAYNE HURLEY



### Latte: Tea or Coffee?

Are you better off with a latte made with tea or one made with espresso?

**Decision:** A coffee (espresso) latte may be bet-

ter, because some tea lattes are loaded with sugar. A Starbucks grande (16 oz.) Green Tea Latte made with nonfat milk, for example, has 290 calories. That's more than the Earl Grey (150), Chai (210), or Chocolate Chai (240) Tea Latte. A venti (20 oz.) Green Tea Latte hits 370 calories.

In contrast, a grande Caffè Latte made with nonfat milk has just 130 calories (from the milk). Vanilla or other sweetened lattes have around 200 calories, but the Skinny lattes (made with the questionable sweetener sucralose) have just 120.

**Tip:** Cut calories even more with a grande nonfat Cappuccino (80), Caffè Misto (70), or coffee and a packet of sugar (20).



### Burrito or Tacos?

Are tacos worse because their tortillas are usually fried?

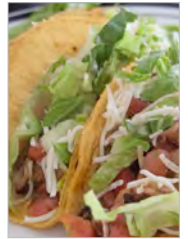
**Decision:** Flour tortillas are worse than soft or

crispy (fried) corn tortillas. At Chipotle or Qdoba, for example, a burrito's flour tortilla has around 300 calories' worth of mostly white flour, plus around 700 milligrams of sodium.

In contrast, three crispy taco-size corn tortillas at either chain have roughly 180 calories and 50 mg of sodium. Soft corn tortillas (Qdoba doesn't offer them) are about the same. Three soft taco-size *flour* tortillas? You might as well get the burrito tortilla.

But it's not just the wrapper. Most people fill a burrito with rice (even more carbs!), beans, chicken, salsa, and cheese. Grand total: some 1,000 calories (and 2,000+ mg of sodium). Three crispy tacos with chicken, cheese, salsa, and lettuce total about 500 calories (and 1,000 mg of sodium).

**Tip:** Lose the flour tortilla. Get a Burrito Bowl at Chipotle or a Naked Burrito at Qdoba. With brown rice, chicken, black beans, salsa, and cheese, it's about 600 calories. Or get a salad (same ingredients, but with lettuce instead of rice). At Chipotle, use the tomato or green salsa instead of the 260-calorie vinaigrette. Qdoba's dressings are low-cal. Just skip its fried tortilla bowl.



### Oatmeal or Yogurt Parfait?

Which makes a better breakfast on the run?

**Decision:** Either. Both beat every muffin, bagel, scone, banana bread, crois-

sant, or other bakery item on the menu.

Starbucks' oatmeal has 150 calories' worth of unsweetened whole-grain oats (and 4 grams of fiber). You can add fresh blueberries (20 calories), dried fruit (100), or a nut medley (100). At Panera, try the pecans (100). At both chains, skip the brown sugar, cinnamon crunch, and agave syrup.

You can't avoid the added sugar (about 5 teaspoons) in the parfaits, though. And Panera's Strawberry Granola Parfait and Starbucks' Greek Yogurt with Honey Parfait have 4½ or 6 grams of saturated fat. But Starbucks' 300-calorie Strawberry Blueberry and Peach Raspberry Yogurt Parfaits keep the sat fat to ½ gram. And the parfaits have more calcium and more protein (8 or 9 grams) than the oatmeal (5 grams; 7 with nuts).

**Tip:** Want more protein? A 170-calorie Breakfast Egg White Bowl with Roasted Turkey from Panera's Hidden Menu has 28 grams. At other chains, look for egg white sandwiches.



### Fries or Sweet Fries?

Sweet potato fries sound like a healthy alternative to regular fries. True?

**Decision:** Nope. Skip them both. Sweet potatoes

have more vitamin A and fiber, but watch out. At Johnny Rockets, for example, the sweet potato fries have more calories (590) than the regular American fries (480). That's partly because Johnny adds sugar to the sweets, which also have far more sodium (800 mg) than the regulars (40 mg). At Chili's, both have about 400 calories. But the Homestyle fries have more sodium (1,370 mg) than the sweets (a "mere" 970 mg).

If you have to pick one, make it the sweets. But if you're ordinarily a no-fries-for-me diner who's seduced by the "healthy" sweet potatoes, you've been tricked.

**Tip:** Stick with a non-starchy vegetable (like broccoli or asparagus) or a green salad for your side.





## Chinese: Beef or Chicken?

At a Chinese restaurant, are you better off ordering chicken or beef?

**Decision:** It depends. If you order General Tso's,

orange, sesame, honey, kung pao, or some other breaded, fried, sauce-laden chicken dish, you'll push away from the table with 1,000 to 1,200 calories...and that's without any rice, according to numbers from Pei Wei, Pick Up Stix, and similar chains. That's more than beef with broccoli and other *unbreaded* beef dishes, which have about 700 to 900 calories without rice.

Chicken with black bean sauce, moo goo gai pan, or another *unbreaded, nonfried* chicken dish, on the other hand, delivers only 600 to 700 calories...and (usually) more veggies. Szechuan and garlic shrimp are in the same ballpark.

Just don't expect less sodium. Most entrées, even the lighter ones, pack 2,000 to 3,000 milligrams (1 to 2 days' worth). Add another 400 mg for every packet (or teaspoon) of soy sauce you use.

And don't assume that vegetarian dishes are a calorie bargain. You're fine with szechuan string beans or Buddha's delight (500 calories), but eggplant in garlic sauce, stir-fried spinach or other greens, or curry vegetables (blame the curry's coconut) hover around 1,000 calories without rice. Even fried tofu with vegetables hits 800 to 1,000 calories. Save (at least) half for tomorrow's lunch.

**Tip:** Whatever you order, try skipping some of the rice. Brown beats white, but both have about 300 calories in a typical 1½-cup serving. At some food courts, you could get 2 cups. That's 400 calories you probably don't need.



## Sandwich or Salad?

For many people, a sandwich is "the usual" lunch. Is a salad better?

**Decision:** A salad beats a sandwich, though you have to choose your salad wisely.

Take Panera. Most of its sandwiches (not the half sandwich in a You Pick 2) and paninis start out with 300 to 500 calories from the ciabatta, french baguette, focaccia, tomato basil, honey wheat, or three cheese bread. Who needs all that (mostly) white flour? The Sierra Turkey on Asiago Cheese Focaccia gets 690 of its 820 calories from the focaccia (510) and the chipotle mayonnaise (180).

Only a few breads, like the sourdough, keep the calories down to 200. And expect roughly 700 to 900 milligrams of sodium—at least half a day's worth—from most of the breads alone. With fillings, most sandwiches hit 600 to 900 calories and 1,000 to 2,500 mg of sodium.

In contrast, a full salad starts with greens (maybe even spinach) and raw veggies. With dressing, chicken, cheese, and other usual add-ons, the totals typically hit 400 to 600 calories. And the veggies' potassium may counter some of the damage done by the sodium (700 to 1,500 mg).

Note: at Panera, you can skip ingredients like crispy wonton strips or croutons, which have about 100 calories each. And you can save another 100 by using just half the dressing. Whatever you order, don't forget to add 180 calories if you get a baguette on the side.

**Tip:** Wraps aren't much different from sandwiches. You're just trading the bread for a 300-calorie white-flour tortilla.



## Pizza or Pasta?

Both pizza crust and pasta supply a load of (usually) white flour. And most pizzas come with cheese. Which does the least damage?

**Decision:** This is a tough one. Both are loaded with calories, carbs, sodium, and more. But at least with pasta, you can dodge the saturated fat...if you're careful.

At California Pizza Kitchen, where each person typically orders an entire pizza, the calories hover around 1,000 for both pizza and pasta. (At Uno Chicago Grill, single deep-dish pizzas range from 1,600 to 2,300 calories.)

That's true even for pizzas like the Original Hand-Tossed California Veggie (1,070 calories) or the Pear + Gorgonzola (1,420). Roughly half the calories come from the crust. CPK's (mostly white flour) honey-wheat with whole



grain crust adds 140 extra calories. And most CPK pizzas deliver 15 to 25 grams of sat fat.

With pasta, you can cut the saturated fat way back (to just 4 or 5 grams)...if it has no cream, cheese, or meat. At CPK, that leaves only Kung Pao Spaghetti. At most other chains, you can go with a red or white clam, marinara, or pomodoro (that is, tomato) sauce.

But watch out. A pasta with cheese or meat is likely to reach at least 10 grams (half a day's worth) of saturated fat. Worse yet, a pasta with cream sauce—like CPK's Pesto Cream Penne or Garlic Cream Fettuccine—can hit 40-some grams of sat fat. Bring your defibrillator.

Sodium is another minefield. Expect 1,200 to 2,400 milligrams in a typical pasta and (stroke alert!) 2,000 to 3,000 mg (1,000 from the crust alone) in most pizzas.

**Tip:** A salad beats both pizza and pasta because you fill up on veggies, not white flour. (Note: at CPK, even the salads have around 1,000 calories, so order a half salad.) If you want to leave with no more fat cells than you brought, stick to a salad or split your pasta (try the part-whole-grain multigrain penne) or pizza. Or take home half for tomorrow.





## Pita: Gyro or Falafel

At a Greek or Middle Eastern sandwich shop, should you get the gyro (a blend of lamb and beef) or the falafel (fried chickpea patties)?



**Decision:** Go with the falafel. The gyro has more saturated fat, more calories, and (usually) more sodium than the falafel—or chicken or vegetable sandwich fillings—on most menus.

Take Daphne's, a "California-fresh" West Coast chain with 56 restaurants that lists calories on its menus and Nutrition Facts on its Web site. The Classic Pita sandwich has 660 calories and 16 grams (more than three-quarters of a day's supply) of saturated fat if you fill it with Fresh-Carved Gyros, but 510 calories and 4 grams of sat fat if you fill it with Falafel. The Gyros' 1,025 mg of sodium also tops the Falafel's 860 mg.

Ditto for the Classic Greek salad. You're talking 620 calories (and 20 grams of sat fat) for the Gyro version versus 540 calories (and 8 grams of sat fat) for the Falafel. And those numbers don't include the dressing (60 calories for the Greek Lite or 110 for the Classic Greek) or the pita (180 calories) and tzatziki sauce (50 calories) that come on the side.

**Tip:** A salad or a pita sandwich with grilled chicken or vegetables trumps both the falafel and the gyro.



## Noodles or Rice?

At some Asian restaurants, you can choose rice or noodles (like lo mein) on the side. Which is best?



**Decision:** If you're talking about a side dish at a quick-order restaurant like Pei Wei or Manchu Wok, go with rice to save on sodium. At Pei Wei, for example, an order of egg noodles has 1,010 milligrams of sodium. At Manchu Wok, the lo mein noodles have 850 mg and the Shanghai noodles will set you back 1,620 mg.

In contrast, steamed rice has essentially no sodium. And Pei Wei and some other chains offer brown rice, which has more fiber and vitamins than white. Just steer clear of the fried rice (800 to 1,200 mg of sodium). And watch out for main-dish noodles (see "Pad Thai or Pad Pak?").

**Tip:** Ask for a side dish of vegetables instead of rice or noodles. The sodium (about 500 mg) isn't low, but the veggies have fewer calories (about 100) than the rice or noodles (300 to 400). And the vegetables' potassium may counter the load of sodium in the rest of your Asian food.



## Pad Thai or Pad Pak?

Pad Thai is wildly popular. Most people have never heard of Pad Pak. Which is best?



**Decision:** Pad Pak—stir-fried vegetables with chicken, shrimp, or tofu and a small side of rice—wins, hands down. That's because Pad Thai—rice noodles, shrimp, bean sprouts, egg, tofu, and crushed peanuts—is such bad news.

At Pick Up Stix, for example, the Chicken Pad Thai has 1,480 calories and 4,300 milligrams of sodium. At Pei Wei, the calories (even for the Vegetable & Tofu Pad Thai) hover around 1,500, and the sodium rounds to a hard-to-believe 5,000 mg—enough for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Somehow, Pad Thai still has a decent reputation. People who would never order an entrée of fried rice don't flinch at a plate consisting largely of oil-soaked rice noodles. Yet Pei Wei's and Pick Up Stix's Pad Thais are worse than an entrée of their fried rice with chicken, shrimp, or beef.

We estimate that the Pad Pak at most Thai restaurants has 400 to 500 calories (plus another 300 for every 1½ cups of rice you eat). Sodium is hard to estimate.

**Tip:** Beware of curry dishes at Thai restaurants. Their coconut can easily supply a day's saturated fat.



## Ice Cream or Frozen Yogurt?

Does Pinkberry or TCBY beat a scoop of Ben & Jerry's or Häagen-Dazs?



**Decision:** Frozen yogurt wins. Even a single (half-cup) scoop of premium ice cream has about 10 grams of saturated fat. Frozen yogurt has anywhere from 0 to 2 grams per half cup.

But if you're not careful, your frozen yogurt could have as many calories as that single scoop of ice cream (250 to 300). That's the case with a (1¼-cup) regular soft-serve frozen yogurt at TCBY or medium at Pinkberry, for example.

And who knows how much people squeeze into those (typically 16 oz.) cups at self-serve chains? (The Nutrition Facts on their posters or brochures are for a measly half cup—just 4 oz.)

Then come the toppings. At Pinkberry, where employees do the scooping, calories range from 10 (fresh fruit) to 50 (nuts or chocolate chips) to 100 (peanut butter crunch) ...if they stick to the tiny one-tablespoon scoop. At a self-serve chain, all bets are off. Topping your two-cup (16 oz.) serving of fat-free chocolate with one scoop each of nuts, chips, and Nutella could rack up 650 calories. Oops.

**Tip:** Order a "kids" or "mini" size (about ½ cup) to keep the calories down around 100, and stick to fresh fruit toppings. 🍓

The information for this article was compiled by Paige Einstein and Lindsay Moyer.



# Going Stir-Crazy

BY KATE SHERWOOD

Four steps to a perfect stir-fry: 1. Do all the chopping and measuring before you turn on the burner. 2. Before you add any food to the skillet, make sure the oil is very hot—that means shimmering (but not smoking). 3. Don't turn the heat down. 4. Keep the food moving constantly. 🍴

Got a question or suggestion? Write to Kate at [healthycook@cspinet.org](mailto:healthycook@cspinet.org).

## Stir-Fried Broccoli & Shrimp

Serves: 2 | Total Time: 25 minutes



- 3 Tbs. dry sherry
- 1 Tbs. reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 1 Tbs. hoisin sauce
- 1 tsp. grated ginger
- 1 tsp. corn starch
- 1 Tbs. + 1 Tbs. canola oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ lb. broccoli florets (4 cups)
- ½ lb. peeled, deveined shrimp
- 1 8 oz. can sliced water chestnuts, drained
- 2 scallions, sliced

You can use chicken, scallops, or tofu instead of shrimp.

In a small bowl, stir together the sherry, soy sauce, hoisin sauce, ginger, and corn starch. • Heat 1 Tbs. of the oil in a large, non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the garlic and stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the broccoli and ¼ cup of water and cook until the broccoli is bright green and all the water has cooked off, about 2 minutes. Remove from the skillet. • Add the remaining 1 Tbs. of oil and stir-fry the shrimp until just pink, 2-3 minutes. Stir in the soy sauce mixture and bring to a boil. Return the broccoli to the pan, add the water chestnuts, and toss with the sauce. Sprinkle the scallions on top. • Serves 2.

Per serving (2 cups + ½ cup brown rice): calories 430 | total fat 16 g | sat fat 2.5 g | sodium 580 mg | carbs 42 g | fiber 8 g | protein 30 g

## Mushroom Fried Rice

Serves: 4 | Total Time: 30 minutes



- 2 tsp. + 1 Tbs. reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 1 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 Tbs. dry sherry
- 1 tsp. molasses
- 1 Tbs. + 1 Tbs. canola oil
- ½ lb. shiitake caps or cremini mushrooms, finely chopped
- 2 cups cooked brown rice, cold
- 6 cups shredded napa cabbage
- 3 scallions, thinly sliced

Wipe the mushrooms off with a paper towel. Don't wash them.

In a small bowl, combine the 2 tsp. of soy sauce with the vinegar and garlic. In another small bowl, combine the 1 Tbs. of soy sauce with the sherry and molasses. • Heat 1 Tbs. of the oil in a large, non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. Stir-fry the mushrooms until browned, 3-5 minutes. Add the soy sauce/vinegar/garlic and stir-fry until dry, 1-2 minutes. Remove from the skillet. • Add the remaining 1 Tbs. of oil and stir-fry the rice for 1-2 minutes. Add the soy sauce/sherry/molasses and stir-fry for 1 minute. Stir in the cabbage and stir-fry until wilted, 1-2 minutes. Toss the mushrooms and scallions with the rice. • Serves 4.

Per serving (1½ cups): calories 220 | total fat 8 g | sat fat 1 g | sodium 250 mg | carbs 32 g | fiber 2 g | protein 6 g

## Stir-Fried Green Beans

Serves: 2 | Total Time: 30 minutes



- 1 Tbs. minced ginger
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1½ Tbs. reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 2 tsp. molasses
- 1 tsp. Asian chili sauce (optional)
- ½ lb. boneless, skinless chicken breast
- 2 Tbs. peanut oil
- ½ lb. green beans, trimmed and cut into 2" pieces
- 1 red bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 4 scallions, cut into 2" pieces
- 1 tsp. toasted (dark) sesame oil

You can use tofu, shrimp, or scallops instead of chicken.

In a small bowl, mix 2 Tbs. of water with the ginger, garlic, soy sauce, molasses, and chili sauce. • Cut the chicken across the width into ¼" -thick slices then into 1" pieces. • Heat the oil in a large, non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. Stir-fry the green beans until tender crisp, 2-3 minutes. • Add the red pepper and scallions and stir-fry for 2 minutes. Remove the vegetables from the skillet. • Add the chicken and stir-fry until no longer pink, 1-2 minutes. Add the soy sauce mixture and bring to a boil. • Return the vegetables to the skillet and toss with the chicken and sauce. Drizzle with the sesame oil. • Serves 2.

Per serving (1½ cups + ½ cup brown rice): calories 470 | total fat 20 g | sat fat 3 g | sodium 550 mg | carbs 42 g | fiber 6 g | protein 30 g



# WHAT'S POPPIN'?

## HOW TO SPOT THE TOP POPCORN

BY JAYNE HURLEY & BONNIE LIEBMAN



**F**ew people think of potato chips, pretzels, and other salty snacks as healthy. But popcorn? With claims like “whole grain,” “high fiber,” “gluten free,” “light,” “94% fat free,” “0 grams trans fat,” and “organic,” it sure *sounds* healthy.

In fact, plain popcorn *is* a healthy, high-fiber whole grain. But some popcorns are so loaded down with saturated or (worse) trans fat that they make chips and pretzels look like broccoli. And some companies pour on so much caramel, chocolate, or other coatings that they've turned their popcorn into candy.

Here's how to dodge the duds and pick the best pops.

*The information for this article was compiled by Lindsay Moyer.*

### Your Serve?

Before you check a popcorn's Nutrition Facts, check the serving size. Why?

■ **Microwave servings vary.**

Most servings range from 3 to 6½ cups. We used a 5-cup serving because that's roughly what's in one single-serve bag or half a multi-serve bag. Five cups isn't much. A *kid's*-size movie popcorn at chains like AMC and Cinemark holds about 6 cups.

■ **Labels are confusing.** It's not

easy to figure out what's in *your* serving of microwave popcorn. You could use the “1 cup popped” column, but most people don't measure how many cups they're eating. Or you could do the math. (That means multiplying the number of calories under “2 Tbsp unpopped” and the grams of sat fat, milligrams of sodium, etc., by the number of “Servings Per Bag” to find out what's in a bag, then dividing by 2 if you eat half a bag, by 3 if you eat a third of a bag, etc.)

What *should* microwave popcorn labels do? Follow Pop Weaver. “Many consumers eat popcorn by the bag,” says its label. “...we make understanding the nutrition facts simpler by providing FULL BAG POPPED information.” Yesss!

■ **Popped servings vary.** Ready-to-eat (bagged) popcorn servings range from ½ cup to 4 cups. That's because a serving is one ounce of popped corn. So the heavier the popcorn, the fewer cups in a serving. Odds are, people do eat less of dense popcorns (though not ½ cup). That's why we used a 4-cup serving for lighter bagged popcorns (which aren't quite as light as microwave popcorns) and a 2-cup serving for heavier (caramel-, toffee-, or chocolate-coated) ones.



A half-cup serving? Orville must be kidding.



Start with “94% Fat Free” or “No Oil” brands.

### Microwave

Here's how to find the best microwave popcorns.

■ **Trans fat.** Apparently, not everybody has gotten the message. Nearly all Jolly Time, many Pop Secret, and a few Orville Redenbacher's still use partially hydrogenated oil, the source of artificial trans fat. A

5-cup serving of Jolly Time KettleMania or Pop Secret Extra Butter, Jumbo Pop Movie Theater Butter, or Kettle Corn hits a heart-threatening 6 grams of trans. Another dinosaur: old stovetop standby Jiffy Pop, which clocks in at 3.8 grams of trans. Doesn't sound like a lot? Even 2 grams a day is too much, say health authorities.

Look for brands—like ACT II, Newman's Own, most Orville Redenbacher's, Pop Secret 94% Fat Free and Light, Pop Weaver, Smart Balance, Quinn, Trader Joe's, and Whole Foods—that don't contain partially hydrogenated oil. That's what we did in picking our Best Bites and Honorable Mentions (see p. 15).

■ **Saturated fat.** Instead of trans, most companies rely largely on palm oil. That can make the saturated fat climb. Five cups of Orville Redenbacher's Butter, Classic Recipe, Kettle Korn, Gourmet White Corn, or Ultimate Butter, for example, deliver around 8 grams of sat fat—nearly half a day's worth. Even Newman's Own Natural has 3 grams of sat fat. (“Natural” popcorns skip the artificial colorings, flavorings, and preservatives, but “natural” doesn't automatically mean “healthy.”)

Our Best Bites and Honorable Mentions have no more than 1½ grams of saturated fat. The two companies that use the healthiest oils: Pop Weaver (mostly canola oil) and Quinn (sunflower, grapeseed, olive, and canola).

■ **Salt.** Pop Secret Homestyle is “made with a sprinkle of salt.” Pop's “sprinkle” means 480 milligrams—a third of a day's supply—in every 5-cup serving. Orville Redenbacher's Classic Recipe's “sprinkle of salt” translates into 390 mg. And “sea salt” doesn't mean “low sodium.” Five cups of Pop Secret Sea Salt deliver 350 mg of sodium.

To many, unsalted popcorn tastes fine, so our Best Bites have no added salt. Honorable Mentions have up to 300 mg.

■ **94% fat free.** To quickly narrow down your search, start with a “94% Fat Free” or “No Oil” popcorn. That will keep a 5-cup serving at around 100 to 150 calories and ½ gram of sat fat. “Light” or “50% Less Fat” popcorns may have more.



**Skinny on the sodium.**

## The Classics

Want to buy your popcorn already popped? The good news: trans fat is hard to find. The bad news: you could end up with 600 calories' worth of popcorn coated with sugar, saturated fat, and salt (see "Candy Corn?").



But even uncoated popcorn can pad your belly and boost your blood pressure. Expect 280 calories in 4 cups of Trader Joe's Popcorn with Herbs & Spices. (The chief spice: salt, which explains the 430 milligrams of sodium.)

Butter-flavored popcorns are a little worse. Vic's Original Classic Butter and Smartfood Movie Theater Butter hit roughly 300 calories and 450 mg of sodium. That's smart?

Your best bet: 4 cups of (delicious) Skinny Pop—regular or Black Pepper—have only 160 calories and a mere 50 mg of sodium.

Other impressive Honorable Mentions: Angie's Boomchickapop Sea Salt (90 mg of sodium), Whole Foods 365 Organic Reduced Fat & Sodium (110 mg), and Vic's Half Salt Lite White (130 mg).

## No Cheese, Please

Since when did cheese become a popcorn staple? Four cups of Vic's Original White Cheddar dump 480 calories and almost half a day's saturated fat (8½ grams) and sodium (700 mg) into your lap. It's like polishing off a 10 oz. sirloin steak before the credits roll.

Whole Foods 365 Organic White Cheddar and Smartfood White Cheddar, at around 350 calories, 4 grams of sat fat, and 600 mg of sodium, aren't much better. "Cheese" on the label is often code for "extra salt" and "extra sat fat" in the bag.



**Like cheese? This is the popcorn to try.**

If your popcorn isn't popcorn without cheese (and if you love rosemary), try Popcorn, Indiana Fit Parmesan & Herb.

At 300 mg of sodium in 4 cups, it just makes an Honorable Mention. And if you're a blue cheese fan, try Good Health Natural Foods Half Naked Wild Blue Buffalo, which cuts the sodium to 150 mg. Just be prepared for a blast of spicy buffalo sauce.



**Still delish with half the oil.**

## The Mighty Quinn

It's "microwave popcorn reinvented" for so many reasons. (The box is made of recycled materials, the paper bag is compostable, and the popcorn is organic.) And Quinn packages its unsaturated oil and its seasoning in separate packets that you mix in after popping. Nice touch.

The oil bumps the calories over our limit (200), except for the oil-free Just Sea Salt flavor. But if you use half the oil packet, all six of the other (still delicious) flavors hit—or just miss—an Honorable Mention.

## Candy Corn?

Kettle corn—popcorn cooked with sugar, salt, and oil—has been around for well over 100 years. Today, heavier coatings of caramel, toffee, and chocolate are giving kettle corns a run for their money.

Honestly. If it's got more sugar than popcorn, it's candy. Here's a rundown of sweet popcorns:



**The sweet popcorn with the least sugar.**

■ **Kettle corn.** "Is it really smart to let yourself fall in love with a snack?" asks the Smartfood Kettle Corn bag. Not when a 4-cup serving has 450 calories, 8½ teaspoons of added sugar, and 380 milligrams of sodium. And the "perfect balance of salt and sugar" in Whole Foods 365 Organic Sweet & Salty Kettle Corn means 350 calories, 12 teaspoons of added sugar, and 690 mg of sodium. That's perfect?

(Note: Microwave kettle corns cut calories by using the possibly unsafe sweetener sucralose.)

■ **Caramel, etc.** Some popcorns are so heavy—thanks largely to their caramel, toffee, or chocolate coatings—that few people would eat 4 cups. But the ½-cup or 1-cup serving on many labels is also unrealistic. So we settled on 2 cups. That's bad enough.

"There's nothing but the best in here," says the Popcorn, Indiana Caramel Popcorn bag. Do they mean the best 440 calories in every 2-cup serving? Or the best 21 teaspoons of added sugar (half a week's worth for women)? Or the best 480 mg of sodium?

And Smartfood Selects Blueberry Almond Vanilla Granola Coated Popcorn has more sugar and brown rice syrup than popcorn, oats, almonds, or blueberries. A 2-cup serving has 12½ teaspoons of added sugar and 560 calories.



**More sugar than popcorn.**

Chocolate-coated popcorns add artery insult to injury. Two cups of Orville Redenbacher's Poppycock Chocolate Lovers pile 12 grams of saturated fat on top of 640 calories and 12 teaspoons of added sugar. Don't blame the chocolate, though. The culprit is the palm and palm kernel oil in the chocolate coating.

Cup for cup, candy-coated popcorns have about triple the calories of regular popcorns.

Only two brands hit our added-sugar cutoff for an Honorable Mention (2 teaspoons): Angie's Boomchickapop Lightly Sweet Popcorn (150 calories and 1½ teaspoons of sugar in 4 cups) and Trader Joe's single-serve Lite Kettle Corn Snack Bags (110 calories and 1 teaspoon of sugar in each 3-cup bag). Popcorn, Indiana Cinnamon Sugar Kettlecorn missed by just 10 calories and ½ teaspoon of sugar. 🍌





# Cream of the Pop

**Best Bites** (✓✓) contain no partially hydrogenated oil and have no added sodium, sugar, or questionable artificial sweeteners. They also have no more than 200 calories and 1.5 grams of saturated fat per serving. **Honorable Mentions** (✓) can have up to 300 milligrams of sodium and 2 teaspoons of added sugar. **Worst Bites** (✗) contain partially hydrogenated oil or at least 6 grams of sat fat, 700 milligrams of sodium, or 10 teaspoons of added sugar. Popcorns are ranked from least to most trans fat, then sat fat, sodium, calories, and sugar. Kettle and candy-coated popcorns are ranked from least to most trans fat, then calories, sat fat, sugar, and sodium.

Microwave—multi-serve (5 cups)	Calories	Sat Fat (g)	Trans Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Added Sugar (tsp.)*
✓✓ Bearitos Organic No Oil No Salt	120	0	0	0	0
✓✓ Newman's Own Organics 94% Fat Free Unsalted	160	0	0	0	0
✓✓ Whole Foods 365 Organic No Oil or Salt Added	150	0	0	30	0
✓ Bearitos Organic No Oil Lightly Salted	130	0	0	100	0
✓ Quinn Just Sea Salt	130	0	0	280	0
Newman's Own 94% Fat Free Butter	160	0	0	340	0
✓ Smart Balance Smart 'n Healthy!	140	0.5	0	90	0
✓ ACT II 94% Fat Free Butter	100	0.5	0	150	0
✓ Orville Redenbacher's SmartPop! Butter	90	0.5	0	220	0
✓ Pop Secret 94% Fat Free Butter	110	0.5	0	270	0
✓ ACT II or Pop Weaver Light Butter <sup>1</sup>	110	1	0	270	0
✓ Whole Foods 365 Organic Light Butter	160	1.5	0	240	0
✓ Jolly Time Smart Balance Light Butter	130	1.5	0	280	0
Pop Weaver—Butter or Extra Butter <sup>1</sup>	160	1.5	0	340	0
Quinn, except Just Sea Salt <sup>1</sup>	270	2	0	210	0
Newman's Own, Orville Redenbacher's, Pop Secret, or Smart Balance Light Butter <sup>1</sup>	140	2	0	300	0
Newman's Own or Orville Redenbacher's Gourmet Naturals <sup>1</sup>	170	2.5	0	330	0
Newman's Own Organics Light Butter	220	4	0	320	0
Jolly Time Smart Balance Butter	200	4.5	0	390	0
Pop Secret Sea Salt	190	5.5	0	350	0
✗ Orville Redenbacher's Kettle Korn <sup>5</sup>	170	7	0	130	0
✗ Orville Redenbacher's—Butter, Cheddar, Classic Recipe, Gourmet White, or Ultimate Butter <sup>1</sup>	220	7.5	0	380	0
✗ Jolly Time Healthy Pop Butter	110	0	0.4*	210	0
✗ Jolly Time Light—Blast O Butter or Crispy 'n White <sup>1</sup>	140	1.5	2	370	0
✗ Orville Redenbacher's Caramel	280	3.5	2.5	40	5
✗ Jiffy Pop	180	2	3.8	270	0
✗ Jolly Time—Blast O Butter, Crispy 'n White, or The Big Cheez <sup>1</sup>	220	3.5	5.5	490	0
✗ Pop Secret, except 94% Fat Free, Kettle Corn, Light, or Sea Salt <sup>1</sup>	220	3	5.8	390	0
✗ Pop Secret Kettle Corn <sup>5</sup>	230	4	6.3	150	0
✗ Jolly Time KettleMania <sup>5</sup>	250	4.5	6.7	400	0.5

Microwave—single-serve (1 bag)	Calories	Sat Fat (g)	Trans Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Added Sugar (tsp.)*
✓ Pop Secret 100 Calorie Pop 94% Fat Free Butter (7 cups)	120	0.5	0	320	0
✓ Trader Joe's 94% Fat Free (3.5 cups)	130	1	0	100	0
✓ ACT II 100 Calorie Butter Mini (5.5 cups)	100	1	0	310	0
✓ Pop Secret 100 Calorie Pop—Butter or Homestyle (6 cups) <sup>1</sup>	130	1.5	0	300	0
✗ Jolly Time 100 Calorie Healthy Pop Low Sodium Butter (5 cups)	110	0	0.4*	100	0

Pre-Popped—multi-serve (4 cups)	Calories	Sat Fat (g)	Trans Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Added Sugar (tsp.)*
✓ Trader Joe's Reduced Guilt Air-Popped	180	0	0	120	0
✓ Good Health Natural Foods <sup>1</sup>	130	0	0	150	0
✓ Popcorn, Indiana Sea Salt	170	0	0	260	0
✓ Angie's Boomchickapop Sea Salt	140	0.5	0	90	0
✓ Whole Foods 365 Organic Reduced Fat & Sodium	150	0.5	0	110	0
✓ Bearitos Organic	160	0.5	0	190	0
✓ Popcorn, Indiana Fit <sup>1</sup>	150	0.5	0	260	0
✓ Skinny Pop <sup>1</sup>	160	1	0	50	0
✓ Vic's Half Salt Lite White	170	1	0	130	0
✓ Vic's Lite White	170	1	0	260	0
✓ Whole Foods 365 Organic Classic	190	1	0	260	0
Smartfood Reduced Fat	170	1.5	0	320	0
Trader Joe's with Herbs & Spices	280	1.5	0	430	0
Popcorn, Indiana Aged White Cheddar	240	1.5	0	460	0
Earth Balance <sup>1</sup>	190	2	0	220	0
Vic's Original White	240	2	0	310	0
Vic's Original Classic Butter	320	2	0	480	0
Smartfood Movie Theater Butter	340	3	0	440	0
Smartfood Selects Parmesan Herb	340	3	0	440	0
Whole Foods 365 Organic White Cheddar	340	3.5	0	550	0
Smartfood White Cheddar	370	4.5	0	660	0
✗ Angie's Movie Pop	210	6.5	0	220	0
✗ Vic's Original White Cheddar	480	8.5	0	700	0

Pre-Popped Kettle Corn—multi-serve (4 cups, unless noted)	Calories	Sat Fat (g)	Trans Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Added Sugar (tsp.)*
✓ Trader Joe's Lite Snack Bags (3 cups)	110	0.5	0	120	1
✓ Angie's Boomchickapop Lightly Sweet	150	0	0	150	1.5
Popcorn, Indiana Cinnamon Sugar	210	0	0	190	2.5
Popcorn, Indiana Kettlecorn	260	0	0	240	3
Angie's Kettle Corn <sup>1</sup>	300	1.5	0	290	3
✗ Whole Foods 365 Organic Sweet & Salty Kettle Corn	350	0	0	690	12
✗ Popcorn, Indiana Drizzled Black & White Kettlecorn	370	10	0	190	6.5
Smartfood Kettle Corn	450	2	0	380	8.5
✗ G.H. Cretors Chicago Mix Popcorn	450	6.5	0	690	7

Pre-Popped Candy Coated—multi-serve (2 cups)	Calories	Sat Fat (g)	Trans Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Added Sugar (tsp.)*
✗ Popcorn, Indiana Dark Fudge Chocolate Chip Kettlecorn	280	9	0	100	5
✗ Trader Joe's or G.H. Cretors Caramel <sup>1</sup>	320	2.5	0	380	12
✗ Popcorn, Indiana Caramel <sup>1</sup>	470	1	0	510	17
✗ Cracker Jack The Original	480	0	0	290	14.5
✗ Smartfood Selects Blueberry Almond Vanilla Granola Coated	560	2.5	0	190	12.5
✗ Orville Redenbacher's Poppycock <sup>1</sup>	620	9	0	380	13
✗ Crunch 'n Munch <sup>1</sup>	470	6.5	0.9*	400	8.5
✗ Orville Redenbacher's Pop Crunch—Brown Sugar Cinnamon or Cheddar & Caramel <sup>1</sup>	490	3.5	NA	500	9.5

✓✓ Best Bite. ✓ Honorable Mention. ✗ Worst Bite. \* Estimate. <sup>5</sup> Contains sucralose. <sup>1</sup> Average. NA Number not available.

Note: The numbers for microwave popcorn in the chart are for unpopped corn.

**Daily Limits** (for a 2,000-calorie diet): **Saturated + Trans Fat:** 20 grams (no more than 2 of them trans). **Sodium:** 1,500 milligrams. **Added Sugar:** 25 grams (6 tsp.) for women, 38 grams (9 tsp.) for men. (Note: To convert teaspoons of sugar to grams, multiply by 4.2.)

Source: company information. The use of information from this article for commercial purposes is strictly prohibited without written permission from CSPI.



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## RIGHT STUFF

### BACKYARD BURGERS



Looking for a new veggie burger to stand in for beef? Give **Lightlife Backyard Grill'n Burgers** a whirl.

For starters, each burger has 20 grams of protein. Middle-aged and older people need about that much at each meal in order to prevent muscle loss, according to some studies.

Some veggie burgers, especially those that don't try to mimic the taste of meat, are low in protein. Gardenburgers, for

example, have just 3 to 5 grams. The meat stand-ins are higher. Most Boca Burgers have 13 to 15 grams of protein. MorningStar Farms Grillers Prime have 17 grams.

But Backyard Grill'n Burgers have even more. That's partly because of ingredients like soy protein isolate and wheat gluten, and partly because of size. They're "25% bigger than the leading national brand," as the label boasts. That means more calories (190) than you'd get in, say, a MorningStar Farms Grillers Original (with 130 calories and 15 grams of protein). But if you can spare the calories, you may find the bigger burger more satisfying.

Backyard Grill'n Burgers aren't low in sodium (350 milligrams). Few veggie burgers are. But they beat (smaller) Grillers Prime (360 mg) and Boca All American Flame Grilled (380 mg).

Then there's taste. "Fire up some backyard barbecue deliciousness with this veggie burger that more than lives up to its name," says Lightlife. Bingo! You can't beat that fresh-grilled, meaty flavor, especially when you cook them in a skillet (rather than the microwave).

Don't look now, but there's a backyard in your kitchen.

**Lightlife: (800) 769-3279**

## FOOD PORN

### CARAMEL APPLE AMBUSH



"If only Mom's apple pie was this good," says the **LongHorn Steakhouse** online menu. It's referring to the **Caramel**

**Apple Goldrush**, a "fresh baked pie crust packed with sweet, juicy Fuji apples, vanilla bean ice cream, drizzled with made-in-house Maker's Mark bourbon-caramel sauce and raspberry sauce."

Let's leave Mom out of this. There's no way she would have packed 1,640 calories and 25 grams (more than a day's worth) of saturated fat into one serving of apple pie. Don't blame it on the apples. The culprit is mostly the thick wrap-around pie crust—not to mention the sugary sauces, filling, and ice cream.

Every other LongHorn dessert that serves one diner—from the Bananas Foster Cheesecake to the Ultimate Brownie Sundae, Mountain Top Cheesecake, and Molten Lava Cake—has fewer calories. And they sound more decadent than "juicy Fuji apples."

Ordering a Goldrush is like having a full rack of LongHorn's Baby

Back Ribs with a side of Seasoned French Fries for dessert *after* you've polished off your LongHorn steak dinner.

"We believe in offering our guests a broad range of dining experiences that appeal to a variety of taste and dietary preferences..." says LongHorn's Web site.

So some guests prefer a dining experience that leaves them with *two* dinners' worth of calories?

You'd never get that baloney past Mom.

**Darden Restaurants: (407) 245-4000**

## dish OF THE MONTH

### Curried Tofu Scramble

Drain and blot a 14 oz. package of firm tofu. Sauté a diced onion in 1 Tbs. of canola oil until lightly browned, 3-5 minutes. Stir in 1 tsp. of curry powder. Crumble the tofu into the skillet. Sauté, stirring, until the tofu is evenly coated with the curry powder. Season with up to ¼ tsp. of kosher salt.