

Food Buyer Beware...

10 Deceptively “Healthy” Foods

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Deciphering what's healthy and why's hype can be a grueling task. Below are ten foods that can easily fool us into thinking they're healthy.

1. Muffins

Contrary to what you might expect, choosing a muffin over a donut may seem like a good idea, but in many cases, you'd be better off with the donut! Most muffins are just cupcakes without frosting, and the ones sold in stores today dwarf the homemade muffins made in granny's kitchen, ten years ago.

Sure, some muffins have healthy ingredients like bran and fruit, but the typical ginormous size ones are also very high sources of sugar and fat, with anywhere from 400 to 650 calories. Even the reduced fat muffins can be in the 350-400 calorie range.

2. Vitamin Waters

There are many manufacturers in this market, including Coke and Pepsi, that are marketing vitamin waters with healthy sounding names. They appear to be pure water with some added nutrients, and all of that is true, if you consider 6-8 teaspoons of sugar a nutrient. Drinking a bottle is like having plain water with a full-sized chocolate bar.

There are some sugar-free versions, but they contain artificial sweeteners, which have been shown to have some potential long-term side effects.

3. Fast-Food Salads

Ordering a salad may seem like a good choice, but not all salads are inherently healthy. The word “salad” conjures up images of vegetables, but you have to consider what’s on top of them. The toppings and dressings can turn a salad into a meal that has more calories and fat than a double burger, large fries and a shake. The main culprits are the bacon bits, croutons, crispy noodles, fried chicken, tortilla chips, and creamy dressings. Too much of a good thing can also make the calories skyrocket, like avocado, cheese, nuts, seeds and olives, which are loaded with fat.

4. Smoothies

If you replaced the word “smoothie” with “milkshake” it would sound a whole lot different, but nutritionally, it would be no better in many cases. Smoothies have an overblown reputation as a “healthy” choice. They can be healthy when ingredients such as plain yogurt and fresh fruit are used, but they can also be sugar and calorie explosions, especially the disproportionately large sized ones, the smallest, often being 16 oz. Many chains use ice cream or sherbet instead of yogurt, and fruit concentrates instead of real fruit resulting in smoothies that can have a whopping 80 grams of sugar and 400-500 calories.

5. Sandwich Wraps

Even though a wrap is typically thinner than a slice of bread, don’t be fooled because the 12-inch ones used in most restaurants are equivalent to about 4 slices of bread. The “wheat” wraps are usually made of refined flour. If you want the goodness of whole grain, look for “100 percent whole grain” or those that contain sprouted grains, for extra fiber and nutrition. Also, the colored “vegetable” wraps don’t contain much “vegetable and can be further colored using food coloring.

When you are ordering a sandwich wrap, although one with lean protein and veggies may appear to be the lighter choice among sandwiches and subs, they are often the highest in saturated fat, and sodium. Choose a smaller sized one, and watch the added high-fat condiments and dressings.

6. Energy Drinks

Their fancy designs and claims to “improve your stamina and performance” are alluring. However, although they claim that there are special ingredients inside that boost your energy, such as herbs, amino acids and minerals, if you look closely at the ingredients, you’ll see that the main ingredients are actually caffeine and sugar, making them not much more than expensive soft drinks.



7. Yogurt-Covered Snacks

The name sounds great, but these highly-processed snacks can be made with partially hydrogenated oil, milk powder, yogurt powder and lots of sugar, changing what used to be healthier raisins and nuts into high-sugar, high-calorie snacks. For a healthier yogurt snack, stir fresh fruit into Greek yogurt and top with some dried fruit and/or nuts.

8. Protein Powders

Want to give your breakfast drink an added protein punch? Protein powder may seem like a good idea, but there are less expensive, tastier and healthier options. Getting the protein from food sources such as tofu, yogurt, nut butters, or flaxseed, can not only taste better than these chalky protein powders but they are also more digestible, less processed and can be higher quality protein options.

9. Veggie Burgers

Many frozen varieties populate the grocery shelves but some are healthier than others. You want a good dose of protein in there and some offer no more than 4-5 grams per serving, which can have less than the buns you're putting them on. Aim for those that have at least 10 grams of protein. Some can also be loaded with sodium and preservatives.

If you are eating out, you will probably be surprised to hear that many restaurants fry them in lots of oil, which negates most of the healthy benefits. Choose those that are grilled or baked instead.

10. Protein/Energy Bars

Although fueling up with a healthy mix of high quality protein and carbohydrates is a good idea before an extensive workout, opting for an energy bar may not be your best bet. While some bars are healthier, others are simply enhanced, higher priced candy bars with even more saturated fat and calories. Their small size can also leave you unsatisfied. Choose bars that have no more than around 200 calories, some fiber, and at least 5 grams of protein.

It's also a good idea to review the ingredient list. Choose ones that are made with only whole ingredients, and no additives or preservatives.

