

9 Foods That Can Fool You!

During my childhood in the 1970's, mothers everywhere used to order something called the "Diet Plate." This was common in restaurants or at home. It consisted of a scoop of cottage cheese; a couple canned peach halves, still dripping syrup; a hamburger patty; iceberg lettuce; and a sprig of parsley.

While delicious by mid-20th century, Midwestern standards, it was about as calorie restrictive as the chicken-fried steak and baked potato my dad was eating across the table. Still, the perception was that this was diet food, most likely because each element in the "Diet Plate" had a vague resemblance to healthier food—except the hamburger, that is.

It'd be nice to think that we've transcended the Diet Plate. Sadly, this isn't the case. Even today, there are dozens of foods we fool ourselves into thinking are healthful when, in truth, they do nothing but pad our hips and clog our arteries. Here are nine of the worst offenders on your grocery store shelves.

1. Yogurt It starts out as good stuff. Fat aside, there's the calcium and protein you find in milk products, along with probiotics, which make it easier to digest for those with lactose issues. The only problem is, straight yogurt can be pretty bitter, so manufacturers load the stuff with sugar to make it more palatable and masquerade those carbs as fruit. Have a look at most flavored yogurt, and you'll find the second ingredient to be sugar or high fructose corn syrup. One container of Yoplait® Original Strawberry is 170 calories with 5 grams of protein and 33 grams of carbohydrates, 27 of which are sugar. Oddly enough, these are the exact same nutrition facts for Yoplait's other, less healthy-sounding flavors, including Key Lime Pie and White Chocolate Raspberry.

Solution: Buy plain yogurt and flavor it yourself. You'd be amazed at how far a handful of raspberries or a tablespoon of honey will go to cut the bitter taste. And while you're at it, choose the low-fat or fat-free stuff. You'll still get all the nutritional benefits.

2. Wheat Bread. If you're reading this, you probably know enough about nutrition to understand that *whole-grain wheat is better for you* than refined wheat. By keeping the bran and germ, you maintain the naturally occurring nutrients and fiber.

But for some reason, manufacturers constantly come up with new chicanery to lead you back to the refined stuff. One of their latest tricks is to refer to refined flour as "wheat flour" because, obviously, it's made of wheat. But just because it's wheat-based doesn't mean it's not refined. The distracted shopper can mistake this label for "whole wheat flour" and throw it in his cart. Another loaf of cruddy, refined, fiberless bread has a new home.

Solution: Slow down when you read the label. That word "whole" is an important one.

3. Chicken. Just because you made the switch from red meat doesn't mean you're in the clear. If you opt for dark meat—the wings, thighs, and legs—you're losing protein and gaining fat. Three ounces of raw chicken breast, meat only, is 93 calories, 19.5 grams of protein, and 1.2 grams of fat. Three ounces of dark meat, meat only, is 105 calories, 18 grams of protein, and 3.6 grams of fat. It doesn't seem like much, but it adds up.

Solution: Go for the breast, and while you're at it, ditch the skin. It's nothing but fat.

4. Frozen or Canned Fruit Any food swimming in juice or "light syrup" isn't going to work

in your favor on the scale. Furthermore, most canned fruit is peeled, meaning you're being robbed of a valuable source of fiber.

Frozen fruit is a little trickier. While freezing preserves the fruit itself, adding sugar during the freezing process preserves color and taste; so many store-bought frozen fruits add it in.

Solution: Read that ingredients list! You want it to say fruit, water—and that's it.

5. Canned Veggies "What?" you declare. "There's light syrup in canned string beans, too?" No, actually, they add salt to preserve this produce. A half-cup serving of canned string beans has approximately 300 to 400 milligrams of sodium.

Solution: Many companies offer "no salt added" options. If you can't find one to your liking, go frozen instead—no salt (or light syrup).

6. Peanut Butter Squish up peanuts, maybe add a little salt. How hard is it to make that taste good? Apparently, it's so incredibly difficult that many companies feel compelled to add sugar or high fructose corn syrup into the mix. Why? I do not know. Some manufacturers, such as Skippy®, are up front enough to admit this and call their product "Peanut Butter Spread," but many others still refer to their sugary concoction as good old "peanut butter."

Solution: Read the label. (There's a theme emerging here.) Considering real peanut butter has one ingredient, two ingredients max, it shouldn't be too hard to figure it out.

7. Juice The range in the nutritional value of store-bought juices is massive. On one end, you have "fruit drinks" with just a modicum of actual juice in them. On the other end, you have fresh-squeezed, 100% preservative-free juice such as Odwalla® and Naked Juice®. But no matter which one you choose, it's important to remember that it's never going to be as healthy as whole fruit. And if you're trying to lose weight, it's a flat-out bad idea. First off, it's been stripped of fiber, so you absorb it faster, which makes it more likely to induce blood-sugar spikes. Secondly, you consume it faster and it's less filling, so you're more likely to drink more.

Solution: If you must buy it, go fresh squeezed, but you're usually better off just skipping it entirely.

8. Canned Soup As is also the case with canned veggies, you're entering a sodium minefield. Half a cup of Campbell's® Chicken Noodle Soup has 890 milligrams of sodium. That's 37 percent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA)*—and who eats half a cup?

Solution: Read those labels carefully. Most companies make low-sodium versions.

9. Salad Dressing/Fat-Free Salad Dressing Dressing, by definition, is supposed to be fatty, thus highly caloric. You use a little bit of it and in doing so, you get a healthy hit of the fats you need for a nutritionally balanced diet. Unfortunately, people prefer to buy fat-free versions so that they can drown their greens yet avoid excess fat.

Nothing's for free. All this stuff does is replace the fat with carbs and salt, so you've basically gone from pouring a little healthy, unsaturated fat on your salad to dumping on a pile of sugar. For example, Wish-Bone® Fat Free Chunky Blue Cheese is 7 grams of pure carbs and 270 milligrams of sodium for 2 tablespoons, which you'll never stop at anyway. Also, given that there's no fat or protein in this particular dressing, one can only imagine what makes it "chunky."

Solution: Make your own salad dressing. One part vinegar and one part olive oil with a blob of Dijon mustard makes an awesome vinaigrette. And here's another trick: Make your salad in a sealable container, add a tiny bit of dressing, and shake it up. It'll coat so much more than tossing will.

And finally, make that salad with romaine lettuce, spinach, or some other nutrient-rich leafy green. As far as we're concerned, nutrient-poor iceberg lettuce should have gone the way of the old Diet Plate.