

... APRIL 2011 ...

QUICK TAKES



Revealing Hidden Calories

Calories matter when you're trying to lose weight. Tracking daily calorie intake with a food journal or an online tracking tool is a proven weight-loss strategy.

You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to conclude that an ice cream sundae is loaded with calories. But you'll have to do a little detective work to find out just how many calories are on your daily plate. Luckily, there are a variety of resources available to help you with the task, including nutrition labels, books, recipes, Internet databases and smartphone apps. Yet it still helps to understand some basics. Your key clues in the hunt for hidden calories include:

- Always check the Nutrition Facts panel
- Learn to interpret front-of-the-box claims
- Look for calorie information posted online
- Remember, portion size really matters

Interpreting Calories

When it comes to packaged foods, it should be easy to calculate how many calories you're consuming. By federal law, the number of calories is the first item listed on the Nutrition Facts label of all packaged foods. But calories are listed per serving, and that can be confusing.



Serving size for package labels is regulated, but the regulations leave some room for maneuvering. Few food manufacturers want to highlight high calorie counts in their products, so they often calculate the Nutrition Facts based on a serving size that's as small as possible. This strategy makes the calorie count seem lower and also minimizes the apparent content of fat, carbohydrate, sodium or other nutrients consumers try to limit. That is why the package of your favorite frozen enchiladas may show an appealing photo of a plate of enchiladas on the front and when you check the Nutrition Facts on the back you discover that the package contains two servings not one. This means you're eating double the calories listed on the label.

- Remember, when tallying a day's calories, you might have to multiply the calories of a particular food by the number of servings you actually eat.

Decoding Front-of-the-Box Claims

By law, food labels must be truthful. But sometimes they don't tell the whole story. For instance, the word "natural" doesn't mean anything about a food's nutritional content or health benefits, and it certainly doesn't mean low-calorie. "Fat-free" may tempt you into believing you're buying a lower-calorie food, but the actual number of calories may be high. Putting the "Organic" seal on a package is strictly regulated by the USDA. It describes how the food was produced and is not an indicator of calories, although a recent study found that many consumers do believe that organic foods have fewer calories than their non-organic counterparts.

- With all packaged foods, you must check the Nutrition Facts!

Soon to Be Posted on Menu Boards Near You – Calories!

Americans spend almost half their food dollars on foods made outside the home. Fortunately, many chain restaurants make nutrition information, including calorie counts, available on their websites or posted somewhere in the establishment. Soon, those calorie numbers should be even easier to locate thanks to Section 4205 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010. The Act requires chain restaurants with 20 or more locations to post calorie information "in a clear and conspicuous manner" for standard menu items on their menus and menu boards. The FDA is currently reviewing enforcement guidelines.

- Check the website or menu board for calorie counts before placing your order!

Portion Size Is Key

How good are you at “guesstimating” the number of calories in the foods you eat? Even the pros have a hard time. “Nearly everyone -- including me -- underestimates the calories in restaurant foods,” said Marion Nestle, a professor of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University. “People underestimate calories even more when the portions are large or the meals are promoted as healthful.”

Normal portion sizes were smaller 40 and 50 years ago. How do we know? Look at old plates and drinking glasses. A standard dinner plate used to be 9 inches in diameter. That’s the size of a child’s plate today. Juice glasses held 4 ounces. Today they’re 6 or 8 or even 10 ounce glasses.

Grab a bowl and a glass from your cupboard, fill them with water and measure the volume. You might find that a cereal bowl you thought held a cup of cereal actually holds 2½ cups, meaning you’ve been eating more than twice what you planned.

At dinner, put your food on a smaller plate and pay attention to the “serving” size. A serving of meat, fish, or poultry is about 3 ounces -- or about half a can of tuna -- but most of us have become accustomed to portion sizes of 8 ounces or more, according to a recent issue of the Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter.

Follow the “Half-Plate Rule” for Balanced Meals

Brian Wansink, food psychologist, director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab and author of “Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think,” suggests this easy way to keep portions and calories in check. At lunch and dinner, half the plate should be vegetables and fruits and the other half should be protein and starch. If you remember the Half-Plate Rule, you won’t think that a plateful of spaghetti and meatballs is a balanced meal. (Add a salad.)

Asparagus with Orange Zest and Shallots Makes: 3 servings

Vegetables are essential in any sound weight-loss program. They contain little or no fat, they’re very low in calories and their fiber provides a sense of fullness. Research at Tufts University suggests that the greater the variety of vegetables in your daily diet, the fewer calories you’re likely to consume -- and the less you’ll weigh.

Asparagus is plentiful in markets now, and at about 85 calories per pound, asparagus is a real bargain for calorie counters.

Ingredients

1 pound asparagus spears, tough ends trimmed
1 large orange, scrubbed
1 shallot or 2 scallions, thinly sliced
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Nutritional info / serving

47 Calories
0.5g Fat
0.1g Saturated fat
4.0g Protein
9g Carbohydrate
2.4g Fiber
16mg Sodium

Preparation

1. Choose a skillet just large enough to hold the asparagus and set it over high heat. Add water to fill 1/2 inch deep.
2. With a paring knife or a vegetable peeler, remove 2 or 3 long strips of orange peel and add to the skillet. Slice the orange in half and squeeze the juice into the skillet. Add the shallots or scallions as well.
3. When the water comes to a boil, add asparagus spears and cook until just tender, about 2 minutes.
4. Drain, season with salt and pepper and serve.



Source:
Healthy Living Kitchens