

Healthy Measures: Are You Indulging in Empty Calories?

Empty calorie foods or junk food, refers to foods that are highly processed and refined. These foods are high in calories, sugar and fat and they are low in nutrients and dietary fibre.

There are a lot of foods on the market that provide empty calories including: candies, soft drinks and fruit-flavoured beverages, alcoholic beverages, fast foods, desserts such as ice cream, brownies and cakes, snack foods such as chips and chocolate bars, and condiments such as butter, margarine, sauces and salad dressings.

Eating foods with empty calories is an easy way to satisfy your hunger, but eating foods with minimal nutritional value can hurt your health in the long run. Consuming too much of these foods can lead to weight gain and chronic disease such as type two diabetes, heart disease and obesity.

Here are some tips to help you control the amount of empty calories foods you consume:

- **Pay attention to your beverages.** Choose water over soft drinks and fruit-flavoured beverages. Water, which is calorie-free, is the best beverage to ease thirst.
- **Be cautious of how much alcohol you drink.** Alcohol provides empty calories. The recommendation for moderate alcohol consumption is no more than two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. One drink is considered a 12-fluid ounce beer (5% alcohol); a 2-fluid ounce wine (12% alcohol); a 3-fluid ounce fortified wine such as sherry, port or vermouth (16-18% alcohol); or 1.5-fluid ounce of spirits or liquor such as rum or vodka (40% alcohol).
- **Small-size it.** Choose smaller sized options. Go for a single burger, with a small or medium sized beverage. Another way to keep your portions reasonable is to ask for child-sized servings.
- **Choose healthier options at fast food chains.** Many fast food chains now provide healthier options where food is grilled, broiled or baked. Skip the fries and munch on some veggies when you get home.
- **Be mindful of condiments and dressings.** Condiments such as mayonnaise, tartar sauce and special sauces are often high in calories and fat. These additions can sometimes double the calories and fat in an entrée. Choose lower fat condiments such as mustard, ketchup, relish and honey.
- **Choose healthier snacks.** Include fresh and frozen fruits and low-fat milk or yogurt. Try whole grain crackers with salsa, hummus or low-fat cheese as snacks. Avoid foods with minimal nutritional value, such as potato chips, chocolate, candies and pop.

For more information:

[Nutrition Matters: Put an End to Portion Distortion](#)

[Eat Right Ontario: Alcohol and Nutrition](#)

[Eat Right Ontario: Healthy Weights – A Matter of Balance](#)

If you have questions about nutrition and healthy eating, contact *EatRight Ontario* at 1-877-510-5102 to speak to a Registered Dietitian.

Healthy Measures: Eat Well, Be Active and Be Yourself!