

# Skinny & Fat

What we love about health foods are the vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. And then there are the fats and the carbs and the calories. And the list goes on. **By Lesley Rotchford**

**T**here's a gleaming high-rise building in Manhattan that's home to some of the richest and most beautiful people in New York City. It's also home to a health-food market, where you'll often see women in the aisles wearing Lululemon, sampling chia-seed juice out of tiny paper cups, and cradling tubs of quinoa salad and bags of kale chips. Some of them will eventually find that,

despite their irreproachable grocery lists, their jeans start to pinch at the waist. And they'll be incredulous: But I eat organic! I'm gluten-free! I drink coconut water!

There is a great dieting irony that's becoming more and more apparent in our current health-obsessed culture: Foods that pack nutritional benefits may also pack on the pounds. "There's a health halo surrounding this stuff, so people don't pay attention to the calories—they eat and eat and think the calories will just disappear," says Lisa Young, an adjunct professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University. These foods may also be loaded with sugar (green juice, for example), or carbohydrates (whole grains), or fat (nuts). "If you add something to your diet, even if it's something healthy, you have to take something out to make up for it, or you're going to gain weight," she points out. So put down that bag of tamari almonds and read on.

## Hummus

"If I open a container of hummus, I finish it," says Molly Calhoun, 36, a writer who is a vegetarian. "Sometimes I don't even bother with baby carrots or crackers; I just eat it with a spoon like it's yogurt." Hummus is so high in calories, in fact, that it's often one of the first things Stephen Gullo, a New York City health psychologist, eliminates from his patients' diets. "But it has protein!" they protest. The chickpea spread also has 70 calories in two tablespoons—but who stops there?—and that's not even counting the vehicle you choose to dip with. "If you're a person who, based on your history, can have just one or two tablespoons of hummus and leave it at that, then it works for you," says Gullo. "But if you know you're going to eat a cup of it, you're going to end up wearing it on your waist." Try one of Walden Farms' zero-calorie vegetable dips instead.

## Grapes

The calories here aren't a problem, but these little pellets of sweetness aren't innocuous. A cup of grapes has 15 grams of sugar. To put that into perspective, three Oreo cookies have 14 grams. Plus, "it's hard to feel satisfied until you've inhaled an entire bunch of grapes," says Cena Jackson, 36, a public relations director for Hermès. For the record, that's around 310 calories and 75 grams of sugar. One way Jackson averts disaster is by freezing grapes before she snacks; the frozen ones take longer to chew, so she naturally eats fewer of them.

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## Nuts

An ounce of almonds or peanuts (that's roughly the size of a shot glass) has 14 grams of fat and more than 160 calories, and if you're plucking them out of a silver bowl at the bar of the Four Seasons Hotel, expect to blow through double that amount. "I am not an overeater by nature, but for some reason I have zero willpower in the presence of raw cashews," says Susan Kelly, 38, a trader at a New York City bank. Integrative-medicine expert Frank Lipman, who is based in New York City, is not surprised: "Nuts tend to be a trigger food, and it's very hard to practice any kind of portion control with them."

To get the nutritional benefits of cashews, almonds, and walnuts—

sugary fruit. "There are six teaspoons of sugar in the average green juice, which is almost as much sugar as there is in a can of soda," says Slayton. And those trendy juice fasts that dictate you consume nothing solid for days? "You miss out on protein and other essential nutrients and get too much sugar. Finally, you dump the fast and put the weight back on," says Janis Jibrin, a nutritionist in Washington, D.C., and the author of *The Pescetarian Plan* (Ballantine Books).

## Dried Fruit

Dehydrated fruit may be even worse than liquefied fruit. "I gained five pounds in three months after I started snacking on dried apricots," says Jessica Bailey, 35, a director of

running for more than an hour, says David Nieman, a professor of health and exercise science at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. "Drink plain water," he says.

## Agave

Since natural-food eaters are generally horrified by the idea of artificial sweeteners, many choose to flavor their food and drinks with agave. Bad move. Made from the key ingredient in tequila, the syrupy sweetener has more calories than sugar—20 per teaspoon to sugar's 15—although it's a bit sweeter, so you use less. While it doesn't make blood sugar spike as dramatically as table sugar (which explains its spot on the bottom half of the glycemic index), agave can sabotage in other ways. It's primarily fructose, and research has shown that too much of that raises the level of triglycerides linked to diabetes and heart disease. "Use Truvia instead, which has zero calories," says Gullo.

## Gluten-Free Snacks

Going gluten-free is what you do when you have celiac disease or, like millions of Americans, you are sensitive to the wheat protein found in baked goods, pasta, and soy sauce. Many people also avoid gluten in an effort to lose weight, which was a reasonable strategy until food companies rolled out cookies, crackers, cereals, and pizzas that are free of gluten yet high in sugar and fat. "When I first went gluten-free, I ate only whole foods, nothing processed, and lost weight," says Roxanne Ierino, 28, a publicist. "Then I started eating gluten-free baked goods and haven't lost a pound since." Lipman advises reading the nutritional information on packaging to make sure portions don't exceed 4 grams of sugar.

## Supergrains

Quinoa, farro, and freekeh are no slouches in the nutrition department: Quinoa is high in protein, amino acids, fiber, and potassium; nutty farro has compounds that can bolster your immune system and lower cholesterol; and freekeh, a grain from the Middle East and the latest to go viral,

**"There's a health halo around this stuff, so people don't pay attention to the calories—they eat and eat."**

such as vitamin E, magnesium, and omega-3 fatty acids—without going overboard, Lipman suggests sprinkling them on salads. That will limit how many you eat, since you aren't likely to excuse yourself from the table to pour on more. You can also count out 20 nuts and hide the rest of the container. Gullo sequesters his beloved cashews behind a steam pipe on the landing of his building (next to his neighbor's emergency pack of cigarettes) to avoid temptation. Registered dietitian Lauren Slayton, the author of *The Little Book of Thin* (Perigee), arms her clients with an Altoids-size nut case to prevent them from "overnutting," as she calls it.

## Green Juice

Juicing used to mean a bodybuilder on 'roids. Now it more commonly refers to a woman with a Breville. Here's the problem: In order to make healthy vegetables like spinach and Swiss chard palatable, dieters blend in a lot of

Connecticut's clean-energy financing authority. "I figured it's fruit—how bad can it be?" Well, pretty bad. Dried fruit naturally contains a lot of sugar and calories (a half cup of dried apricots has about 25 grams of sugar and 107 calories), and manufacturers often add sugar to tart fruits like cranberries and cherries. "It's basically just like eating candy," says Gullo. Choose fresh fruit instead, but limit especially sugary ones, like bananas, grapes, and mangoes.

## Coconut Water

The refreshing juice of young coconuts is another superfood with weight-gain potential. Dubbed "nature's Gatorade" by athletes, it contains electrolytes, like sodium and potassium, which can aid in exercise recovery. But a small carton has 45 calories—low by sports-drink standards but not insignificant—and some brands add sugar or fruit puree. What's more, you don't need extra electrolytes unless you are

One nutritionist gives her clients an Altoids-size case to portion out nuts.

has about four times as much fiber as brown rice. But in the weight-loss world, a carbohydrate is a carbohydrate, and these are fairly high in calories. Nicole Avena, a neuroscientist at the New York Obesity Research Center at Columbia University and the author of *Why Diets Fail* (Ten Speed Press), says patients can gain weight from eating mounds of the trendy grains. “The fiber makes you feel fuller longer, but like other carbohydrates, they can activate the brain’s reward system, which may lead some people to over-consume.” That’s a concern, considering a cup can have between 200 and 260 calories. The key here is portion control: Slayton reminds clients that a serving should be the size of your fist.

## Kale

Kale is barely edible until it’s sprinkled with raisins and drizzled with salad dressing. (There’s a reason Caesar had to wear a toga, says Gullo.) “On its own, kale is extremely helpful for weight loss, but we don’t always eat it that way,” says Jibrin. Her favorite preparation is kale pureed with almond milk, potatoes, onions, and nutmeg, served as a satiating 48-calorie-per-cup soup.

## Raw foods

When you eliminate cooked foods from your diet, the pickings get slim, but you may not. Lots of raw foods, like cabbage, carrots, and celery, are unimpeachable, but those on raw-food diets tend to turn to high-calorie nut butters, fruit purees, and dehydrated starches to form the basis of a filling meal. And stopping at a juice bar for a raw snack after Spin class can be trouble: A slice of key lime pie from one popular chain (made of coconut, lime, avocado, buckwheat, and sunflower seeds) has 880 calories, and the taco salad (with avocado, walnuts, and olive oil) from another chain of juice bars has 410 calories. As with veganism, a closely related diet, eating only fruits and vegetables has definite benefits. But as Mark Hyman, a prominent diet doctor in Lenox, Massachusetts, recently told *The New York Times*, “I know a lot of fat vegans.” ♦

