

Nutrition Action

HEALTH LETTER™
CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Fat Chance

New Clues to Why We Gain Weight

We eat too much. We move too little. Then we have dessert.

Normal-weight Americans are now a minority. Two out of three adults and one out of three children are either overweight or obese. Researchers think that the epidemic has reached a peak in adults, but not in children. And so far, no one has a magic bullet to melt the pounds away.

But people aren't heavy simply because they lack will power. "Overweight people were told, 'Just behave, and you'll be fine,'" says Eric Ravussin, who heads the Division of Health and Performance Enhancement at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Now we know that the obesity story isn't so simple.

Continued on p. 3



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MEMO FROM MFJ

Can Giant Grocers Benefit Consumers?



Walmart is America's largest food retailer. It markets about 20 percent of all the food sold in the country. It's also a retailer that many people love to hate. The chain's economies of scale and suburban or exurban locations have wiped out numerous smaller hardware, housewares, clothing, and grocery stores. And its relatively low wages and anti-union policy have made it a longstanding target of labor unions.

But Walmart appears to be gradually morphing in a much more socially responsible direction—to burnish its image, protect its bottom line, and actually do good.

Because it is such a huge buyer of goods, when Walmart snaps its fingers, suppliers jump. Walmart has used that unrivaled market power in some environmentally sensible ways.

For instance, the corporate giant basically forced the entire detergents industry to switch to concentrated liquids, which dramatically reduced package sizes, solid waste, and transportation costs. And Walmart says that it is making its new stores 25 percent more energy efficient, aiming to double the efficiency of its truck fleet, and encouraging its 100,000 suppliers around the world to improve their energy efficiency.

In October, Walmart announced that it will use its market power to support a new, global sustainable-agriculture initiative to help small and medium-size farmers. The chain has set targets to get more local, fresher foods into its stores. By 2013, Walmart says that it expects to double, to 9 percent, the amount of locally grown fruits and vegetables it sells ("locally" means grown in the same

state). That would lower transportation costs and reduce air pollution. The goal sounds modest, but it would involve a huge amount of food, and I hope it will increase over time.

Major retailers like Walmart, Costco, Kroger, and Safeway also could make the food supply healthier. A huge retailer simply could tell its suppliers to eliminate partially hydrogenated vegetable oil (the source of trans fat) from their foods. Poof! Goodbye trans. A retail giant could tell its suppliers that their foods must have less than a given amount of sodium. Bingo! Watch the sodium tumble.

Similarly, giant food retailers could require

their suppliers to say on the fronts of packages whether sodium or sugar or saturated fat was "high," "medium," or "low." If manufacturers had to call their foods "high sodium," they might find a way to use less.

Grocery stores have long been passive sellers of whatever foods their suppliers provided. Let's hope that Walmart and

the entire grocery industry working together will exercise their bargaining muscle on the customer's behalf.



By 2013, almost 10 percent of Walmart's produce will be grown locally, says the retail giant.

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Center for Science in the Public Interest

Our Hero

In October, CSPI Executive Director Michael Jacobson received the 2010 CDC Foundation Hero Award at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The award honored Jacobson for championing nutrition and food safety initiatives, empowering consumers to make healthful choices, and encouraging scientists to engage in public interest activities.

We've Moved!
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Fat Chance

COVER STORY

New Clues to Why We Gain Weight



We live surrounded by a 24-hour, all-you-can-eat buffet. And yet some people manage to stay lean while everyone else gains weight. Is it will power? Genes? Metabolism?

“Given the world we live in, the real question isn’t why people get fat, but why some people manage to stay thin,” says obesity researcher Eric Ravussin.

Here are some surprising new leads into what packs on the extra pounds... and how to keep them off.

Leptin

Q: What do we know about obesity that we didn't know 20 years ago?

A: Since the discovery of leptin in 1994, we have made giant strides in understanding how the body regulates fat stores. Leptin is a hormone produced by fat cells. It tells the brain when the body has enough fat. [See “Leptin’s Legacy,” p. 4.]

When people lose weight, their leptin goes way down, and the body interprets that as a state of starvation. In the leptin-deficient mouse, the response is “I need to eat. I don’t have any energy stores.” The same happens in people.

Q: So lower leptin levels push us to regain the lost weight?

A: Yes. Almost everyone can lose 10 percent of their weight. It’s not easy. You have to eat less and exercise more. But 95 percent of people can do it. Unfortunately, 95 percent of people regain at least some of the weight they lose.

Q: Why?

A: When people lose 10 to 20 percent of their body weight, their metabolic rate drops. Their metabolism becomes thrifty. So they need fewer calories to stay at their lower weight than people who have always weighed that much.

That puts the dieters at higher risk of regaining the lost weight. And they’re hungry most of the time. So it’s a constant struggle.

Q: And leptin is the culprit?

A: Yes. When researchers replenish dieters’ leptin by injecting it, their metabolic rate goes back up. We naïvely thought that if you gave the overweight enough leptin, it would shut down their food intake and also increase their metabolic rate. But it doesn’t because most overweight people are resistant to leptin.

Q: Is that like insulin resistance?

A: Yes. Eighty to 90 percent of people with type 2 diabetes continue to produce insulin, but the insulin doesn’t work because they are resistant to it.

We have found the same with people who are obese. Their bodies produce leptin in abundance but the leptin doesn’t work. In fact, many people are resistant to both leptin and insulin.



Eric Ravussin holds the Douglas L. Gordon Chair in Diabetes and Metabolism at Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He is also chief of Pennington’s Division of Health and Performance Enhancement and heads Pennington’s Nutrition Obesity Research Center. He is a principal investigator in the CALERIE (Comprehensive Assessment of Long-term Effects of Reducing Intake of Energy) Study and a former president of the Obesity Society. From 1998 to 2000 he was director of endocrine research at the Lilly Research Laboratories of the pharmaceutical firm Eli Lilly and Company. Ravussin spoke by phone to Nutrition Action’s Bonnie Liebman from Baton Rouge.

Q: Is there any way to get around leptin resistance?

A: Drug companies have looked, but it’s not that easy. And they haven’t just looked at leptin. For example, melanocortin receptor 4 signals the body to stop eating. Scientists thought that if they could find a drug that would keep this receptor active, it would cause weight loss. And pharmaceutical companies developed the drugs, but they don’t work because the body has other ways to avoid starvation.

When the survival of an organism is at stake, the body has redundant systems. It’s like if a plane had only one system to take down the landing gear, you would be in big trouble if the hydraulic system didn’t work. So the body has redundant systems to avoid starving.

Genes & Epigenetics

Q: Do genes make some people fat?

A: Any population has a range of body weights. That’s mostly due to genes. The prevalence of obesity has been climbing steeply from the late 1970s to 2010. But people on the skinnier end of the range have remained skinnier and the heavier have gotten even heavier.

Some people are better at resisting weight gain than others. They’re restrained eaters or their genes help them resist weight gain.

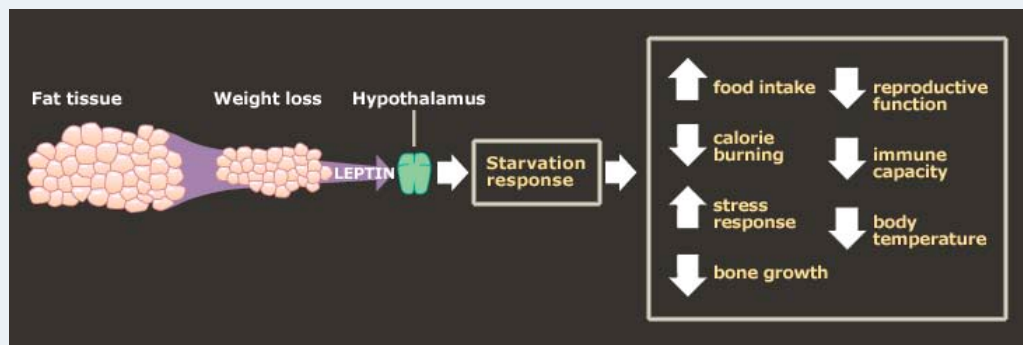
Q: How?

A: Genes affect both energy intake and energy expenditure. For example, the metabolic rate of people of the same sex, age and body size may vary by as much as 500 calories per day.

Genes also affect how active we are when we’re not trying to exercise. Some people jiggle their legs, tap their fingers, and otherwise fidget more than others. They burn more calories unconsciously. One study estimated that if obese people spent about 2¾ hours more each day



Leptin's Legacy



Most of leptin's effects occur through the hypothalamus, the part of the brain that integrates all basic drives and regulates food intake, energy expenditure, and glucose and fat metabolism. With weight loss, the body's fat stores shrink and therefore produce less leptin. The hypothalamus responds by shifting several body systems into starvation mode. It results in urges to eat more and expend less energy, making it difficult to maintain the weight loss. Other changes, such as increased stress response and weakened reproductive and immune function, cause their own set of problems.

Source: The Friedman Lab, *HHMI Bulletin*, March 2003, pp. 24–27.

standing or walking instead of sitting, they could burn an extra 350 calories a day.

Q: Why would our genes set us up for obesity?

A: As humans evolved, people who could take in lots of calories when food was available and store those calories efficiently as body fat were the people most likely to survive through famines and to pass on their genes. For millions of years, evolution favored people of this 'thrifty' genetic type.

Q: Now it's a liability?

A: Yes. The environment has changed the whole picture because today we can eat very palatable food very cheaply all the time, and we don't need to expend very much energy to get this food. Our genes haven't changed over the last 40 years, but our environment has.

Q: And our environment promotes weight gain?

A: Yes. I worked for a long time with the Pima Indians in Arizona. More than 75 percent of them are overweight or obese. There is another community of Pima Indians in Mexico that has the same—or close—genetic pool, yet very few of them are overweight or obese. The rate of diabetes is 6 percent in the Pimas in Mexico versus 45 percent in the Pimas in Arizona. In diabetes, as with other diseases, genetics loads the gun and environment pulls the trigger.

If you bring these people from the Sierra Madre to southeast of Phoenix, it's very likely that they'll become like the Pimas in Arizona. It's not like the Mexican Pimas are malnourished. They just have a healthier diet with more foods they get from the ground—more vegetables and fruit. And they have to burn more calories to get their food.

Q: Can anything change our genes?

A: No, but it may be possible to change how genes are turned on and off. At Pennington's Nutrition Obesity Research Center, our focus is nutritional programming. When you have an inbred strain of animals like mice, 99.9 percent of their genes are the same. Yet when you place the mice on a high-fat diet, some gain more weight than others. And when you

put them in cages where they can run in a wheel, there is a huge variability in how much they run. Despite having exactly the same genome, you see differences.

Q: And the same is true in people?

A: Yes. Ten years ago, if I had seen identical twins with an exact, hundred-percent match in DNA, I would have told you that they are exactly the same. Not any more. We see differences that go beyond DNA, and those differences seem to be partly due to the influences of nutrients during fetal and early life.

Studies of people born in the 1920s have found that having a low birth weight increased their risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity. Something which is not genetic—but what scientists call epigenetic—happened to these babies.

Q: What does epigenetic mean?

A: Epigenetic literally means above genes. Epigenetics changes the expression of genes. For example, if you have a gene that produces leptin, you can change the amount of leptin that is made.

This is a fascinating area of research. When it comes to obesity, we are 10 years behind cancer researchers, who have been dealing with epigenetics for more than 20 years.

Temperature

Q: What else might affect weight?

A: Last year, three studies reported the discovery of brown adipose tissue—

also called brown fat—in adults. White adipose tissue is where your body stores calories as fat. In contrast, brown adipose tissue burns as many calories as skeletal muscle. Instead of storing fat, brown adipose tissue burns it.

We believed for 20 years that brown adipose tissue was present only in newborns. It's a cold shock for babies to be born. After being in the womb at 98 degrees, they need to maintain their temperature going into a room that's at 70 degrees. So they need to generate a lot of heat, and it's generated by brown adipose tissue.

Q: And researchers thought that brown adipose tissue disappeared?

A: Yes, we thought it was gone after the first two years of life. But scientists who were using PET scans to look for tumors, which show up because they consume a lot of glucose, found healthy areas that also consume more glucose. The researchers did biopsies and found that it was brown adipose tissue.

Now there's hope that people may be able to increase their mass of brown adipose tissue. The heavier you are, the less you have. It decreases with age and it's surprisingly higher in females.

Q: How can people increase their brown adipose tissue?

A: That's what we're studying. One way is to increase cold exposure, but that's not easy because everything now is kept at a comfortable temperature. People used to burn more calories staying warm when

it was cold. When it was hot outside, the heat curbed our appetites. Now we keep our thermostats set at about 70 degrees whether it's cold or hot outside.

Viruses

Q: Could a virus cause weight gain?

A: Scientists are looking at about 10 different viruses that may contribute to obesity. The researcher doing much of the work on adenovirus-36, for example, is two doors down from me.

Human adenovirus-36 increases fat stores in chickens, mice, and non-human primates. Infected marmosets gained four times more weight than uninfected controls. We can't give the virus to humans to see if they gain weight, but in one study of roughly 500 people, researchers found antibodies to the virus in 30 percent of the obese but in only 11 percent of the non-obese. That means a greater percentage of the obese had been infected with the virus.

On the other hand, it's not like cholera. I don't think we have an obesity epidemic because of a virus. But we have been a little naïve to say that only food intake and exercise matter.

Gut Bacteria

Q: What else might matter?

A: The bacteria in your gut are very important. Several years ago, researchers showed that by transplanting feces from a fat animal to a lean animal, you can make the lean one fatter, and by transplanting feces from a lean animal to a fat animal, you can make the fat animal leaner.

And in early October, at the European Congress on Diabetes, there was a report showing that a human-to-human feces transplant could make someone less insulin resistant. You have to take antibiotics to get rid of your gut bacteria before the transplant—and I don't know how it's done—but they found that transplanting feces into people at risk for the metabolic syndrome improved their insulin sensitivity.

Q: Does our diet influence our gut bacteria?

A: Yes. The Pima Indians in Mexico have an enormous amount of

fiber in their diet—10 times more than the Pimas in Arizona, who have much higher rates of diabetes and obesity. The Mexican Pimas eat a lot of beans, which have a lot of resistant [indigestible] starch. So they have more fermentation in the lower gut, which changes their bacteria. But we don't know yet if eating beans or anything else would help people lose—or not gain—weight.

Surgery

Q: What else has surprised you?

A: One of the fascinating stories is the success of surgery for obesity, especially surgery that bypasses part of the small intestine.

We know that the surgery reduces the volume of the gut, and that it changes the delivery of nutrients to the gut. But when surgery changes the tubing of the gut, so that food totally skips the duodenum, these people are not as hungry.

Q: And it's not just because their stomachs are smaller?

A: No. So now there are companies making sleeves that can be put into the gut so food avoids contact with the duodenum.

Why would that help? It's because so many peptides—protein fragments—are secreted by the cells in the gut. Glucagon-like peptide-1 is the major one. It stimu-

lates insulin secretion. If you change the secretion of these peptides, it makes people less hungry.

Q: Does it also change their response to insulin?

A: Yes. Patients lose their insulin resistance. I recently went to Rome to attend the first meeting on using surgery to treat type 2 diabetes. It was basically gastric bypass surgery, which can cure people of type 2 diabetes. And it's not just because they're losing weight.

The Bottom Line

Q: What can people do today?

A: I think we have too much snacking. People basically take in calories all the time. That's not a good thing.

And studies by Barbara Rolls at Penn State show that the volume of the food you eat is very important. If you have lower calorie density, you can eat the same volume with fewer calories. [See "Perfecting Pasta."]

We know that those who engage in more physical activity are more likely to maintain their weight loss. I'm skinny but I love to eat. The reason I exercise is to be able to eat what I want.

Q: How can we reverse the obesity epidemic?

A: First, if it's an epidemic, that means it's been triggered by the environment. And what do you do if you have too much malaria? You drain the swamps. What do you do if you have too many deaths on the highway? You impose seat belts. These are public health measures.

What do you do when you have an epidemic of obesity? We're going to have to impose taxes on soft drinks and subsidize healthier food. And we need safe neighborhoods where kids can play.

Where I grew up in Lausanne, Switzerland, physical education was mandatory. We didn't have the elite high school teams where if you're not on the varsity, you don't do anything.

My grandmother knew that if you want to lose weight, you have to eat less and exercise more. We're still there, but the real trigger of the obesity epidemic is the environment.

Perfecting Pasta



How to Lower Calorie Density

- Decrease the amount of pasta
- Increase the amount of vegetables
- Omit the cream sauce

More food, fewer calories. You can feel full on fewer calories by cutting a dish's calorie density. Replacing the fatty cream sauce and some pasta with vegetables slims down this pasta primavera.

Source: *The Volumetrics Eating Plan*, by Barbara Rolls and Robert Barnett (2000, HarperCollins).

NO MAGIC BULLET

BY DAVID SCHARDT

Wouldn't it be nice if you could just take a pill and watch the pounds melt away? Here's the evidence for four popular supplements.



SlimChance

Name: SlimShots.

Pitch: "Eat up to 30% less without feeling hungry."

Ingredient: Nine grams of Fabules, an emulsion of palm oil, oat oil, and water that's packaged in a coffee-creamer-like pod.

Cost: \$40 to \$80 a month.

Claim: When Fabules reaches the lower regions of the small intestine, it triggers signals to the brain that make you feel satiated.

Evidence: In three studies, people who consumed 2 to 5 grams of Fabules in the morning ate about 30 percent fewer calories at lunch and dinner than on the day they got a placebo.¹⁻³ In a fourth trial, 10 grams of Fabules in the morning didn't change how much women ate at lunch.⁴

The one-day studies didn't last long enough to measure the impact of Fabules on weight. In an 18-week trial that *did* look at weight, women who had dieted and lost an average of 17 pounds regained 3 pounds if they ate yogurt that contained 5 grams of Fabules twice a day. Similar women who ate yogurt without Fabules regained 7 pounds.⁵

Bottom line: More studies are needed to see whether SlimShots can modestly help dieters keep weight off.

¹ *Int. J. Obes. Relat. Metab. Disord.* 24: 1419, 2000.

² *Int. J. Obes. Relat. Metab. Disord.* 25: 1487, 2001.

³ *Eur. J. Clin. Nutr.* 56: 368, 2002.

⁴ *Eur. J. Clin. Nutr.* 60: 1081, 2006.

⁵ *Int. J. Obesity* 31: 942, 2007.



Nonsensa?

Name: Sensa.

Pitch: "Lose 30 pounds without dieting. Guaranteed." "Eat all your favorite foods and still lose weight."

Ingredient: Blends of scented, flavorless starch crystals that you sprinkle on your food.

Cost: \$59 a month.

Claim: Sensa enhances the smell of food, which triggers an "I feel full" signal in your brain and makes you eat less.

Evidence: The details of the two company-sponsored studies have never been published. Brief descriptions appear on Sensa's Web site.

The larger study didn't compare Sensa with placebo crystals, so it's possible that sprinkling *any* crystals on food would have led the participants to lose weight. What's more, four out of every ten people who started the study didn't finish it, which suggests that "guaranteed" Sensa may not have performed as billed.

Bottom line: Until studies that test Sensa against a dummy pill are published in peer-reviewed journals, there's no way to tell whether the crystals are any better than a placebo.

Sigh

Name: Any weight-loss supplement that contains Açai.

Typical pitch: "Burn Fat! Lose Weight. Get Energized. Feel Great!"

Ingredient: Açai (pronounced ah-SIGH-ee), a Brazilian berry.

Cost: Whatever the marketers can get away with.

Claim: Açai makes you eat less, metabolize fat faster, and lose weight.

Evidence: Weight-loss claims for açai berries are "utterly false," according to the Federal Trade Commission. "There is no evidence to support them," notes the agency.

Açai berry Internet weight-loss scams are in their third year and are still going strong. Hundreds of thousands of consumers have surrendered their credit card numbers for "risk free" trials after being snookered by fake blogs, phony news Web sites, bogus celebrity endorsements, and doctored before-and-after photos. The victims then find their credit cards billed for unauthorized, exorbitant charges that are difficult to stop.

Bottom line: Don't fall for açai berry weight-loss claims.



Out With the Stool

Name: Alli (pronounced AL-eye).

Pitch: "You can lose up to 50% more weight than you would from dieting alone."

Ingredient: Orlistat, a former prescription weight-loss drug that is now available over the counter.

Cost: \$60 a month.

Claim: Alli prevents roughly a quarter of the fat in food from being absorbed by the body, so those fat calories are lost in the stool.

Evidence: Alli used to be a prescription drug, so it has been well-tested. In 22 studies, orlistat users (mostly obese women) lost roughly six more pounds while dieting for a year than similar women who took a placebo.¹ They also were more likely to suffer from diarrhea and intestinal gas.

Bottom line: If you're dieting, taking Alli may help you shed a few more pounds.



¹ *Ann. Intern. Med.* 142: 532, 2005.

The Bottom Line



BY BONNIE LIEBMAN

Our articles take an in-depth look at the latest on diet and disease. But what if you just don't have time to read what researchers are finding or thinking?

This tough quiz helps you cut to the chase. Some questions (those that begin with "All but one...") may sound confusing. But the choices tell you four ways (not just one) to, say, lower your risk of stroke.

1. To burn off the 450 calories in a Panera muffin, a typical 150 lb. person would have to walk briskly for roughly how long?

- a. ½ hour
- b. 1 hour
- c. 1½ hours
- d. 2 hours

2. Which is least likely to protect your memory?

- a. take ginkgo biloba
- b. lose excess weight
- c. exercise at least 30 minutes a day
- d. keep your blood pressure under control
- e. stay mentally and socially engaged

3. Which of these Italian restaurant dishes typically has the fewest calories?

- a. spaghetti & meatballs
- b. lasagna
- c. eggplant parmesan
- d. chicken parmesan
- e. cheese ravioli

4. All but one of these may lower your risk of stroke. Which one won't?

- a. keep a lid on blood pressure
- b. eat 8 to 10 fruits and vegetables a day
- c. cut back on salt
- d. take B vitamins
- e. lose extra weight

5. Which is most likely to lower breast cancer risk?

- a. eat more fruits and vegetables
- b. eat more soy foods
- c. lose (or don't gain) excess weight
- d. take vitamin D
- e. eat less red meat

6. Coffee drinkers have a lower risk of all but one of these conditions. Which one?

- a. Parkinson's disease
- b. arthritis
- c. kidney stones
- d. type 2 diabetes
- e. gout

7. Which of these desserts typically has the fewest calories?

- a. brownie sundae
- b. plain cheesecake
- c. apple crisp à la mode
- d. tiramisu
- e. chocolate lava cake

8. Cutting back on salt may lower your risk of all but one of these. Which one?

- a. kidney disease
- b. stiff arteries
- c. colon cancer
- d. enlarged heart
- e. osteoporosis

9. What's the best way to avoid catching a cold?

- a. take vitamin C
- b. take Airborne
- c. take echinacea
- d. don't share food
- e. keep your hands clean

10. All but one of these can keep arteries from stiffening as you age. Which one doesn't?

- a. lose excess weight
- b. cut back on salt
- c. limit saturated fat
- d. take folic acid supplements
- e. eat potassium-rich foods

11. Which may lower your risk of osteoarthritis?

- a. lose (or don't gain) excess weight
- b. limit strength training
- c. eat less salt
- d. limit alcohol

12. Which is least likely to have pesticide residues?

- a. strawberries
- b. bell peppers
- c. broccoli
- d. spinach
- e. apples



13. All but one of these may lower your risk of diabetes. Which one?

- a. drink water instead of soda or juice
- b. take vitamin E
- c. replace refined grains and sweets with whole grains
- d. watch your weight
- e. get at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise a day

14. Since 1970, U.S. cheese consumption has:

- a. dropped by 50 percent
- b. dropped by 25 percent
- c. stayed the same
- d. doubled
- e. tripled

15. Consuming all but one of these may help keep you regular. Which one probably won't help?

- a. wheat bran
- b. prunes
- c. psyllium
- d. salad
- e. coffee



- 16. Which of these Chinese restaurant dishes typically has the most calories?**
 a. beef & broccoli
 b. eggplant in garlic sauce
 c. mu shu pork
 d. General Tso's chicken
 e. combination lo mein
- 17. Which may protect the prostate?**
 a. take selenium
 b. take vitamin D
 c. take vitamin E
 d. take zinc
 e. lose (or don't gain) excess weight
- 18. What's the best way to prevent wrinkles?**
 a. avoid sugar
 b. take high doses of vitamin E
 c. stay out of the sun
 d. drink green tea
 e. take fish oil supplements
- 19. Excess pounds raise the risk of all but one of these cancers. Which one?**
 a. colon
 b. brain
 c. kidney
 d. pancreatic
 e. esophageal
- 20. Getting too little sleep can do all but one of these. Which one?**
 a. lead to bone loss
 b. make dieters lose less fat and more muscle
 c. make cells resistant to insulin
 d. make you hungrier
- 21. Soy foods can help prevent or treat which of these?**
 a. breast cancer
 b. high cholesterol
 c. memory loss
 d. osteoporosis
 e. hot flashes
- 22. We're eating more now than in 1970 of all but one of these. Which one?**
 a. beef
 b. flour
 c. cooking and salad oils
 d. sugar and corn syrup
- 23. Which may lower your risk of kidney stones?**
 a. drink more grapefruit juice
 b. take vitamin C
 c. cut back on calcium-rich foods
 d. eat more fruits and vegetables
- 24. Red meat may raise the risk of all but one of these. Which one?**
 a. arthritis
 b. pancreatic cancer
 c. heart disease
 d. colon cancer
 e. global warming

ANSWERS

1. c (1½ hours). You could also jog for an hour or swim laps, bicycle, or work on a stair machine for 45 minutes. So think twice before you bite.

2. a (take ginkgo biloba). Ginkgo has failed to boost memory in most studies. In the latest, 1,500 people aged 72 to 96 who took 240 milligrams of ginkgo every day for six years had no better memory, attention, or any other measure of thinking ability than 1,500 similar people who took a placebo.

On the other hand, people who exercise, avoid weight gain in middle age, keep their blood pressure under control, and stay mentally and socially engaged appear to score better on memory tests as they age. Although that's not proof, there are plenty of other reasons to take those steps.

3. e (cheese ravioli). Cheese ravioli has about 650 calories if it's topped with marinara sauce. Meat or cream sauce ups the calories. Lasagna has roughly 850 calories, while chicken or eggplant parmesan (with a side of spaghetti) and spa-



ghetti & meatballs climb to about 1,000 calories each. Pastas with cream-and-cheese sauces like Alfredo or carbonara typically reach 1,200 to 1,500 calories.

4. d (take B vitamins). Lowering salt is critical. Trimming excess weight and boosting fruits and vegetables also lower blood pressure. Exercise may also help, but high doses of B vitamins (like B-6, B-12, and folic acid) don't.

5. c (lose—or don't gain—excess weight). You can also lower your risk by getting more exercise and limiting alcohol.

6. b (arthritis). People who drink either regular or decaf coffee have a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, gout, and kidney stones.

Lower Parkinson's risk is linked only to regular coffee. A small number of studies also find that people who consume more caffeine have a lower risk of Alzheimer's and other types of cognitive decline.

7. d (tiramisu). Tiramisu typically has about 500 calories. And that's low compared to most popular desserts served at chain res-

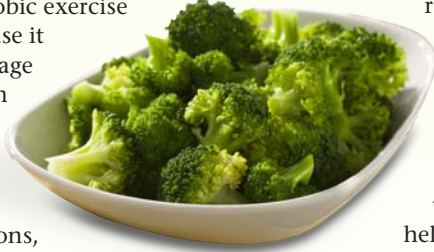
taurants. Apple crisp à la mode and plain cheesecake hit 750 calories, while a chocolate lava cake or brownie sundae clocks in at 1,000 calories or more.

8. c (colon cancer). Excess salt may harm the kidney, increase calcium losses, and make arteries less flexible. (Stiff arteries are often an early sign of heart disease.) Too much sodium can also cause left ventricular hypertrophy—a thickening of the walls of the heart's main pump (the left ventricle) that can result in an enlarged heart. But the strongest reason to eat less salt is to lower your blood pressure.

9. e (keep your hands clean). Sharing food is unlikely to spread colds because the virus needs to go from your hands to your eyes or nose. So wash your hands frequently. Taking high doses of vitamin C (1,000 mg a day) before and while you have a cold may shorten the duration by half a day or so, but there's no good evidence that vitamin C, products like Airborne, or echinacea can prevent colds.

10. d (take folic acid supplements). Stiff arteries can raise your risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, and cognitive decline. There's no good evidence that folic acid supplements keep arteries supple.

11. a (lose—or don't gain—excess weight). Less weight takes a load off your joints. Strength training may curb joint pain by strengthening the muscles around the joints. Walking, dancing, biking, or other aerobic exercise may also help because it revitalizes the cartilage and synovial fluid in your joints.



12. c (broccoli). Other “consistently clean” produce: onions, avocados, frozen corn, frozen peas, pineapples, mangoes, asparagus, kiwi, bananas, cabbage, and papayas. On the other hand, apples, bell peppers, spinach, and strawberries are members of the “dirty dozen,” along with peaches, celery, nectarines, cherries, pears, imported grapes, lettuce, and potatoes. You can dodge the pesticides by buying organic.

13. b (take vitamin E). Losing (or not gaining) excess weight is by far the most critical step you can take to keep type 2 diabetes at bay. Exercise should also help, even if it doesn't lead to weight loss. Regular soft drinks, refined grains, sweets, and even fruit juice may raise your risk by boosting blood sugar levels.

14. e (tripled). The increase is mostly due to the cheddar and mozzarella that show up on pizzas, burgers, steaks, salads, chicken, fries, nachos, sandwiches...and our waistlines and arteries.

15. d (salad). A typical salad of greens, tomato, cucumber, etc., doesn't have much fiber (unless you add beans). Activia yogurt can help keep some people regular, but there's no good evidence that other brands (like Yo-Plus) have the same effect.

16. d (General Tso's chicken). General Tso's chicken usually has around 1,300 calories. Expect about 1,000 calories in tofu & mixed vegetables, eggplant in garlic sauce, combination lo mein, beef & broccoli, or mu shu pork. Orange (crispy) beef and kung pao chicken hover around 1,500 calories. Only a handful of dishes—like

Buddha's Delight, shrimp with lobster sauce, moo goo gai pan, and Szechuan string beans—typically get the calories down to around 500. And don't forget to add 200 calories for every *cup* of rice you eat.

17. e (lose—or don't gain—excess weight). Obesity may raise the risk of *fatal* prostate cancer. Selenium, vitamin E, vitamin D, and zinc don't help. In fact, men who took high doses of zinc (80 mg a day)

were more likely to be hospitalized for genitourinary problems like benign enlarged prostate, urinary tract infections, kidney stones, or kidney failure.

18. c (stay out of the sun). The sun's ultraviolet rays are the chief cause of wrinkles. There's no clear evidence that green tea's polyphenols help or that sugary foods hurt. High doses of vitamin E (1,000 to 2,000 IU a day) or fish oil (3,000 to 4,000 mg a day) delay skin reddening in the laboratory. Whether that translates into fewer wrinkles isn't clear, and such high doses of vitamin E may not be safe.

19. b (brain). Excess weight also promotes cancers of the uterus and breast, as well as fatal prostate cancer.



20. a (lead to bone loss). In a recent (though small) study, people lost more muscle than fat when they got too little

sleep (less than six hours a night) while they were dieting. Sleep deprivation also makes you hungrier, especially for high-carbohydrate foods. And lack of sleep may make your body respond poorly to insulin.

21. b (high cholesterol). Twenty-five grams a day of soy protein—around four cups of soy milk or 15 oz. of firm tofu—can lower LDL (“bad”) cholesterol by about 3 percent. Of course, LDL also drops if you eat soy in place of red meat or cheese, but that's because you're eating unsaturated soy fat instead of saturated meat and dairy fat. So far, soy has struck out on other counts.

22. a (beef). Many people think that America has been on a low-fat diet for 40 years. Not true. Since 1970, when the obesity epidemic began, oils have more than tripled, flour has gone up by 25 percent, and sweeteners have risen by 14 percent. Beef has dropped by 22 percent, but we've made up the difference by eating more than twice as much chicken as we did in 1970.

23. d (eat more fruits and vegetables). Fruits and vegetables are rich in citrates, which help prevent calcium oxalate stones (the most common type). In general, drinking more fluids helps. Coffee

and citrus juices are especially good, with one exception: people who drink grapefruit juice have a higher risk of kidney stones. Taking high doses of vitamin C (1,000 to 2,000 mg a day) can also increase risk. Ditto for high doses of calcium (1,000 mg a day) if you're already getting about 1,000 mg a day from food.

24. a (arthritis). Red meat's saturated fat explains its link to heart disease. Researchers aren't sure why red meat (beef and pork) appears to raise the risk of colon and pancreatic cancer. Livestock accounts for 18 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions—more than transportation. 🍌

How'd You Do?

Get about half of the questions wrong? Don't worry. So did most of the people we tried the test on. Look at it this way: had you aced the test, you wouldn't have learned anything.

- 21-24 You're a superstar.** Looking for a job?
- 16-20 An “A” on our curve.** Can we call you with questions?
- 11-15 Hang in there.** Most people scored in this range.
- 1-10 Oops.** Stop wrapping your fish in *Nutrition Action*.



Good Gums

DHA, an omega-3 fat found largely in fish oil, may lower the risk of periodontitis, a chronic inflammation of the gums that can lead to bone and tooth loss.

Scientists examined the gums of roughly 9,000

people in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Those who reported consuming at least some DHA on the previous day were about 20 percent less likely to have periodontitis than those who reported consuming none. The link with EPA—the other major omega-3 fat in fish—was weaker, and there was no link with alpha-linolenic acid, the omega-3 fat that's found in soy, canola, and flax oil.

What to do: Scientists won't know if DHA can keep your gums healthy until they test it on people who have or are at risk for periodontitis. But it's still worth shooting for two servings a week of fatty fish like salmon to lower your risk of heart disease.

J. Am. Diet. Assoc. 110: 1650, 1669, 2010.

More or Bigger Fat Cells?

When adults overeat, the fat cells in their waist expand, while the fat cells in their thighs grow in number, at least in the short run. Earlier studies had suggested that adults don't grow new fat cells.

Researchers at the Mayo Clinic told 28 normal-weight men and women (they were roughly 30 years old) to eat until they were more full than usual at every meal, and to also eat one to four daily "supplements" (a king-size Snickers bar, a Boost Plus "nutritional energy drink," or an ice cream shake). Each had about 350 to 500 calories.

After eight weeks, the participants had gained about 10 pounds—including 8½ pounds of fat. On average, subcutaneous (just-below-the-skin) fat cells in the belly

got bigger, while fat cells in the thighs grew in number. The average participant created 2.6 billion new thigh fat cells.

Like it or not, thigh fat may be less damaging because belly fat is more closely linked to diabetes and heart disease.

However, there were hints that "extensive, prolonged" weight gain would also lead to more belly fat cells. That's what happened to women whose belly fat cells were large when they entered the study. (Sorry. There's no easy way for you to tell how large your fat cells are.)

What to do: The next time you reach for more, don't forget: your body has to put the excess somewhere.

Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 107: 18226, 2010.

Every Move You Make

The average American woman aged 50 to 69 spends about eight hours a day sitting. Moving more—for work or play—lowers breast cancer risk.

Researchers tracked more than 97,000 women for seven years. Those who reported walking or biking to work most days of the week for at least six years were 20 percent less likely to be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer than those who typically walked or biked to work for less than a year or never.

In a second study, scientists reported that women who were inactive and who sat for at least nine hours a day were twice as likely to be diagnosed with cancer of the endometrium (lining of the uterus) than inactive women who sat for fewer than three hours a day. (Women were "inactive" if they engaged in vigorous activity for less than 20 minutes at least three times per week.)

What to do: Get on your feet...or bike.

Am. J. Publ. Health 100: 2288, 2010 and Brit. J. Cancer 103: 933, 2010.

Meat & the Liver

Red meat (beef and pork) may harm the liver, while white meat (poultry and fish) may protect it.

Researchers tracked 495,000 men and women for seven years. Those who ate the most red meat (about 4 ounces a day) were 2½ times more likely to die of chronic liver disease and about 75 percent more likely to be diagnosed with liver cancer than those who ate the least red meat (about four ounces a week).

People who ate the most saturated fat were 3½ times more likely to die of chronic liver disease and nearly twice as likely to be diagnosed with liver cancer than those who ate the least sat fat.

In contrast, people who ate more white meat had a lower risk of both illnesses.

What to do: Eat less beef, pork, and other sat-fat-rich foods (like cheese, ice cream, and baked desserts like cakes, pies, and cookies) to protect your heart...and maybe your liver. 🍷

J. Natl. Cancer Inst. 102: 1354, 2010.



Main Coast

BY KATE SHERWOOD

Just toss a salad and cut a loaf of crusty bread while any of these main courses is cooking and you've coasted to a super good supper. 🌱

Got a question or suggestion? Write to healthycook@cspinet.org.

Savory Eggplant with Lentils



Tastes like the eggplant spent all day simmering in the savory sauce. For variety, try ½ lb. of whole wheat pasta instead of the lentils.

- ¾ cup black or green lentils
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 bay leaf
- 4 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 small Italian eggplants (about ¾ lb. total), diced
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 large carrot, diced
- 3 Tbs. tomato paste
- 1½ cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 generous handful of basil leaves, chopped
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper**

In a medium pot, simmer the lentils, garlic, and bay leaf in water to cover by an inch until the lentils are tender but not mushy, about 20 minutes.

While the lentils are cooking, add 3 Tbs. of the oil to a large, non-stick skillet and sauté the eggplant until golden brown and tender, 8-10 minutes. Set the eggplant aside in a bowl.

In the same skillet, add the remaining 1 Tbs. of oil and sauté the onion and carrot until lightly browned, 8-10 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste and cook for another 2 minutes. Stir in the broth, eggplant, and basil. Season with up to ½ tsp. salt and pepper to taste.

Drain the lentils and discard the bay leaf. Spoon the lentils into individual bowls and top with the eggplant. Serves 4.

PER SERVING (1½ cups)

Calories: 310	Sodium: 320 mg
Total Fat: 15 g	Cholesterol: 0 mg
Sat Fat: 2 g	Carbohydrates: 35 g
Protein: 12 g	Fiber: 13 g

Pepper, Onion, & Sweet Potato Frittata



Not a fan of peppers? You can use almost any sautéed vegetables. Try mushrooms, spinach, scallions, peas, asparagus, and/or broccoli.

- ¾ lb. sweet potatoes, diced
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 1 green pepper, diced
- 1 red onion, diced
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 4 large eggs, lightly beaten
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt

In a small pot, cover the sweet potatoes with cold water by an inch and bring to a boil. Cook until tender, about 5 minutes, then drain well. Meanwhile, over medium heat, sauté the peppers and onion in a large (12") non-stick skillet in 1 Tbs. of oil until tender, 5-7 minutes. Push to one side and add the remaining oil and the drained potatoes. Sauté all the vegetables together until they start to brown, 5-7 minutes.

Reduce the heat to medium-low. Pour in the eggs and tilt the skillet to distribute them evenly. Cook until the eggs are almost completely set and the bottom is browned, 3-4 minutes. Invert a large plate that's slightly smaller than the diameter of the pan and hold it firmly against the eggs. Flip the pan and the plate together, so that the frittata falls onto the plate. Gently slide the frittata back into the skillet and cook until the eggs are fully set, 1-2 minutes. Allow to cool slightly and season with up to ¼ tsp. salt. Serves 4.

PER SERVING (¼ frittata)

Calories: 240	Sodium: 240 mg
Total Fat: 12 g	Cholesterol: 210 mg
Sat Fat: 2.5 g	Carbohydrates: 24 g
Protein: 9 g	
Fiber: 4 g	

Pepper, Onion, & Sweet Potato Frittata

Roasted Shrimp & Cherry Tomatoes



Juicy tomatoes, creamy beans, bursting-with-flavor shrimp. There's no better way to make a weeknight dinner special.

- 2 pints cherry tomatoes, halved
- 4 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 anchovies, minced
- ½ tsp. red pepper flakes (optional)
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- ¼ cup orange juice
- 1 lb. peeled & deveined large shrimp
- 1 15 oz. can no-salt-added cannellini beans, drained and rinsed

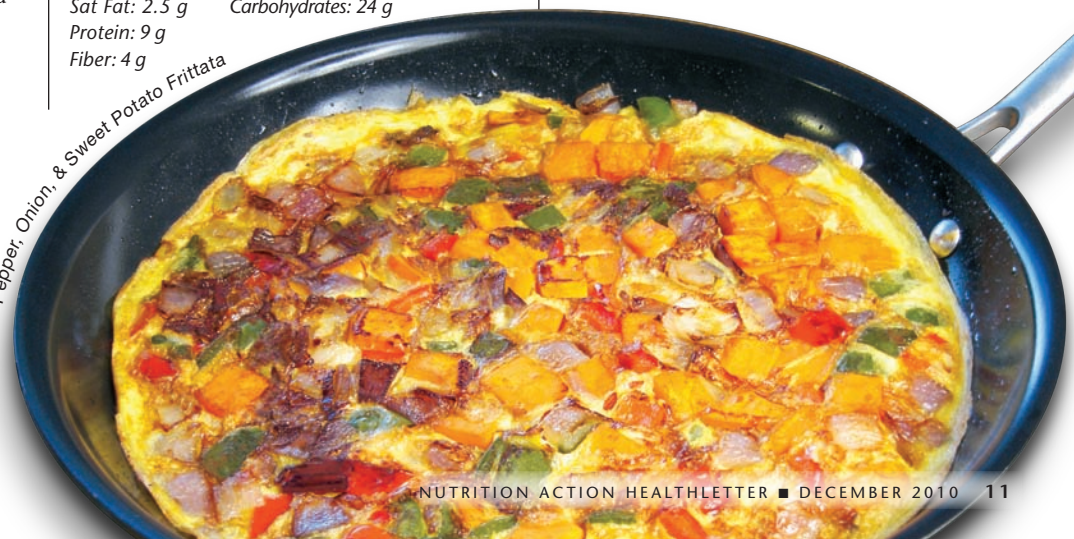
Preheat the oven to 425° F. Toss the tomatoes with 2 Tbs. of the oil in a large baking dish. Roast the tomatoes for 20 minutes.

While the tomatoes are roasting, mix the remaining 2 Tbs. of oil in a large bowl with the garlic, anchovies, pepper flakes, salt, pepper, and orange juice. Stir in the shrimp and let marinate while the tomatoes finish roasting.

Remove the roasted tomatoes from the oven. Distribute the beans, shrimp, and marinade over the tomatoes and return to the oven. Roast until the shrimp are pink and curled, about 6 minutes. Serves 4.

PER SERVING (1½ cups)

Calories: 370	Sodium: 400 mg
Total Fat: 17 g	Cholesterol: 175 mg
Sat Fat: 2.5 g	Carbohydrates: 23 g
Protein: 30 g	Fiber: 6 g



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What's New in the Frozen-Food Aisle

BY JAYNE HURLEY & BONNIE LIEBMAN

The frozen-food aisle isn't what it used to be. Sure, you'll still find the familiar stacks of boxed "healthy" entrées and meals from Lean Cuisine, Healthy Choice, Smart Ones, and others. Most have barely enough food for dieters or your Aunt Sadie (you know, the one who eats like a bird). But with at least 500 or 600 milligrams—a third of a day's worth—of sodium, they sure don't skimp in the salt department (though they're lower than the 750 to 1,300 mg of sodium you'd get in a regular Stouffer's or Marie Callender's).

What's new? Alongside the single-serve boxes are a growing number of frozen meals in multi-serve bags. They're still salty, but you can cut the salt—and create a healthier meal—by adding your own fresh or frozen vegetables.

Here's a sampling of frozen entrées or meals that come with no more than about 400 mg of sodium...and some fixer-uppers that drop below 400 mg—in fact, the sodium gets cut roughly in half—if you add an equal amount of veggies.

Information compiled by Danielle Hazard.

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Contessa knows how to cook. Its MicroSteam frozen meals are a cut above the usual.

Take the MicroSteam Garlic Chicken Penne—a mix of white-meat chicken, penne pasta, asparagus, mushrooms, and garlic in a sun-dried tomato sauce. Each cup comes with 270 calories and 460 milligrams of sodium out of the bag. Sad to say, but that almost passes for low sodium in the frozen food aisle.

We microwaved the 20 oz. bag of Garlic Chicken Penne, then microwaved an equal amount of frozen broccoli. (Microwaved or steamed fresh broccoli or asparagus would also work.) We stirred both into a large bowl. Result: the sodium and calories per cup were cut roughly in half. And there was plenty of creamy sun-dried tomato sauce and garlic to go around.

Contessa's MicroSteam dishes vary in sodium (350 to 660 mg) and saturated fat (1½ to 8 grams). Clearly, the ones at the top of those ranges need extra veggies. But if you're looking for a fixer-upper, Contessa is a great place to start.



HEARTY HARVEST

When was the last time your frozen entrée consisted of plantains, black beans, sweet potato, kale, whole grain pilaf, amaranth polenta, and spicy ancho sauce?

Clearly, this isn't your mother's Lean Cuisine.

Kashi Mayan Harvest Bake doesn't just combine any old vegetables with beans and whole grains. It picks nutrient-rich veggies like kale and sweet potatoes. That's why every single-serve tray delivers a day's worth of vitamin A, 20 percent of a day's vitamin C and iron, and an impressive 8 grams of fiber that comes largely from intact grains and beans, not inulin, maltodextrin, or other poorly absorbed carbohydrates that masquerade as fiber.

And the sodium (380 milligrams) is far less than you'd get in most 340-calorie entrées (and in most other Kashi entrées, which can hit 750 mg). But with flavorful plantains and sweet potato and that spicy ancho sauce, the salt shaker won't cross your mind.

Also worth trying: Kashi's delicious sweet and spicy Black Bean Mango (380 mg of sodium, 340 calories, and 7 grams of fiber).

Bonus: Kashi's box is made of 100 percent recycled paperboard, and the company has trimmed its packaging weight. "Our new packaging uses less material, which means less energy and water to make it, and a reduction in the number of our trucks on the road," explains the box. Nice.





MARK IT

Lean Cuisine Market Creations are “like nothing you’ve tasted before,” says the product’s Web site. “Ingredients steam to perfection—tender meats, crisp veggies and al dente pasta—and taste so good, you’ll never believe they were frozen.”

That’s a bit over the top. Also over the top is Market Creations’ sodium—670 to 700 milligrams per (10 oz.)

bag. That’s for only about 270 calories and 1 cup of food.

Solution: add veggies.

That’s what we did with Market Creations Shrimp Scampi—a mix of shrimp with pasta, broccoli, yellow carrots, and red peppers in a lemon garlic sauce.

When we added 1 cup of microwaved frozen broccoli (you could easily add steamed fresh broccoli instead), one serving became two and the sodium dropped to around 350 mg per cup. Bonus: the potassium in the added broccoli helps counter the excess salt in the Market Creations.

How did it taste? Darned good.

Why bother with pasta that isn’t whole grain? Because, fortunately, there isn’t much of it in the Shrimp Scampi.

Lean Cuisine Spa Cuisine uses whole-grain rice and pasta, and about half of Healthy Choice All Natural Entrées are part whole grain. (Bravo to both!) Unfortunately, they also deliver 450 to 600 mg of sodium per serving. That’s lower than most of the competition, but why can’t they get below 400?



EASY JOE'S

Looking for something to tuck away in the freezer for evenings when cooking is so not an option?

If you’re lucky enough to

live near a Trader Joe’s, try Trader Giotto’s Roasted Vegetable Multi-Grain Lasagna.

Okay, it’s not perfect. Each 260-calorie serving (¼ tray) has 440 milligrams of sodium, which is more than our 400 mg cut-off (though it’s far less than the 1,010 mg you’d get from a similar-size serving of Stouffer’s party size Vegetable Lasagna.) And the multi-grain pasta is mostly white flour. But after a short 12 to 15 minutes in the microwave, out comes a vegetable-rich, cheesy, vegetarian lasagna that should please all palates.

Saturated fat? A great-for-lasagna 2½ grams.

Another Trader Joe’s find: Toss a bag of frozen Fire Roasted Bell Peppers and Onions (they have no added salt) with a bag of frozen Penne Arrabbiata or Penne Pepperonata in the skillet or microwave. If you divide the entire contents into four 1-cup servings, the Arrabbiata ends up with 360 mg of sodium per serving and the Pepperonata with 220 mg. And you end up with more vitamins A and C and potassium.

You can even add some whole-grain pasta or drained-and-rinsed (or unsalted) white beans to stretch it further. Each of the pennes has more than enough kick to carry the extras.

GIMME LIGHT

How many companies can you name with a “Light in Sodium” line?

We thought so.

Amy’s gets a gold star just for developing the line, which includes canned soups, chilis, and refried beans, as well as frozen entrées, meals, bowls, pizzas, and more. All come in at less than 400 milligrams of sodium.

Our favorite: the nearly-all-organic Indian Mattar Paneer. The 320-calorie dish—curried peas and paneer cheese, chana masala (garbanzo beans and tomatoes), and (white) basmati rice—has 390 mg of sodium. That’s half what you’d get in Amy’s regular Indian Mattar Paneer. But you’d never know it. Indian dishes may be easier to de-salt because of their spiced sauces, garlic, and onions.

As for Amy’s other Light in Sodium frozen entrées, the reviews were mixed. The Vegetable Lasagna was delicious (and part whole-grain), but the Black Bean Vegetable Enchilada, Mexican Casserole Bowl, Country Cheddar Bowl, and Veggie Loaf were uninspired. And—except for the Brown Rice & Vegetables Bowl and part-whole-grain-but-fatty Macaroni & Cheese—most were refined grain.

Memo to Amy: Try more Indian dishes. Memo to other brands: Where’s *your* Light in Sodium line?



BISTRO BEAT

Turkey breast in rosemary mushroom sauce with green beans & lentil-quinoa pilaf.

That’s what you get in

Organic Bistro Whole Life Meals Savory Turkey dinner. That and only 1½ grams of saturated fat and an almost-unheard-of-for-a-frozen-entrée 240 milligrams of sodium in a 370-calorie serving. (Ounce for ounce, Marie Callender’s Turkey with Stuffing has nearly four times as much sodium.)

And those calories come with 7 grams of fiber (more than a quarter of a day’s worth), 30 percent of a day’s iron, 13 percent of a day’s potassium, and 10 to 20 percent of a day’s vitamin A, vitamin C, and magnesium. Not bad.

The pricey line has a few duds—the Wild Salmon needs work and the Alaskan Salmon Cake is hopeless. But other Organic Bistros—which range from 110 mg to 430 mg of sodium—use ingredients like coriander, thyme, sun-dried tomatoes, and shiitake mushrooms to make their whole grains, beans, and vegetables come alive. Another plus: the boxes are made of 100 percent recycled paperboard.

The next time you find yourself at a Whole Foods or similar market, check them out. 🍴



NUTRITION ACTION HEALTHLETTER INDEX

2010

ADHD

and food dyes, Sept., p. 10

Alcohol

and breast cancer, Jul./Aug., p. 1, Oct., p. 8

Alzheimer's Disease (see "Memory")

Artificial Sweeteners, Jan./Feb., p. 1

Bones

and calcium, vitamin D, potassium, Sept., p. 1, Nov., p. 1

and exercise, grains, protein, fruits, vegetables, vitamin A, salt, medications, Nov., p. 1

sodium and calcium loss, Apr., p. 1

Cancer

bladder and water disinfectants, Jun., p. 1

breast and alcohol, Oct., p. 8

breast and alcohol, exercise, hormones, insulin, weight, etc., Jul./Aug., p. 1

breast and soy foods, Mar., p. 9, Jul./Aug., p. 1

breast and walking, biking, Dec., p. 10

colon and vitamin D, Apr., p. 7

colon polyps and folic acid, Mar., p. 9

colon polyps and omega-3 fats, May, p. 7

endometrial and exercise, Dec., p. 10

and food dyes, Sept., p. 10

and fruits and vegetables, Jun., p. 8

liver and red meat, Dec., p. 10

pancreatic and vitamin D, Sept., p. 1

prostate and blood cholesterol, Jan./Feb., p. 9

rare cancers and vitamin D, Jul./Aug., p. 8

Changing American diet, Mar., p. 10

Cholesterol (see also "Heart Disease")

in eggs, Nov., p. 1

and prostate cancer, Jan./Feb., p. 9

and selenium, Jan./Feb., p. 9

sugars and HDL, Jun., p. 12

Coffee

caffeine and atrial fibrillation, Sept., p. 9

coffee houses, Apr., p. 12

and diabetes, Mar., p. 9

and gout, Oct., p. 8

Depression

and chocolate, Jun., p. 12

Diabetes

and brown rice, Jul./Aug., p. 8

coffee, tea and risk of, Mar., p. 9

and exercise, weight, Jan./Feb., p. 9, Jun., p. 8

and green leafy vegetables, Nov., p. 8

and magnesium, Sept., p. 1

and sugars, Jan./Feb., p. 1, Jun., p. 8

and trans fat, refined carbs, red meat, Jun., p. 8

and vitamin D, Oct., p. 8

and whole grains, Jul./Aug., p. 8, Nov., p. 8

Dish of the Month (back cover)

Almond beans, Nov.

Apple walnut lentil salad, Jun.

Bulgur salad, Oct.

Creamy cilantro sauce, Sept.

Grilled asparagus with mayonnaise dressing, May

Quick chickpea salad, Mar.

Quick orzo veggie risotto, Jul./Aug.

Quick spinach salad, Dec.

Roasted veggies, Apr.

White beans and tuna salad, Jan./Feb.

E. coli (see "Food Safety")

Editorials – Memos from MFJ (p. 2)

2010: the year to cut salt, Jan./Feb.

food advertising to children, Jun.

food labeling reform, Mar.

food safety bill, Oct.

food technologists, Sept.

giant grocers and social responsibility, Dec.

McDonald's Happy Meals toys, Jul./Aug.

in memory of Larry Jacobson, May

slack fill in packages, Apr.

Eggs

and *Salmonella*, cage-free, omega-3 fats, humane & other claims, Nov., p. 9

Exercise

and bones, Nov., p. 1

and breast cancer, Jul./Aug., p. 1

and diabetes, Jan./Feb., p. 9

and memory, Apr., p. 7

and Parkinson's disease, Nov., p. 8

sitting and risk of dying, Sept., p. 9



and stiff arteries, Oct., p. 1

strength training for bone, muscle, Jun., p. 8

and weight, May, p. 7, Jun., p. 8

Fats and Oils

natural trans and cholesterol, Apr., p. 7

omega-3 claims on eggs, Nov., p. 9

omega-3s and colon polyps, May, p. 7

omega-3s and hearing loss, Sept., p. 9

omega-3s and periodontitis, Dec., p. 10

omega-3s and telomeres, Apr., p. 7

omega-3s, saturated fat and stiff arteries, Oct., p. 1

omega-3's, trans fats, and endometriosis, Jun., p. 12

saturated fat and liver cancer, chronic liver disease, Dec., p. 10

Food Labeling

claims on egg cartons, Nov., p. 9

latest scams, Oct., p. 9

misleading claims, Mar., p. 2

white flour in ingredient lists, Jan./Feb., p. 10

Food Porn (back cover)

Applebee's Sizzling Skillet Fajitas, Sept.

Cinnabon Cupcakes, Jun.

Denny's Grand Slamwich, Jul./Aug.

Hebrew National Quarter Pound Beef Franks and Nathan's Dinner Beef Franks, Jan./Feb.

Kashi GOLEAN Chew Bars, Apr.

Land O'Lakes Margarine, May

Olive Garden Lasagna Fritta, Oct.

Pillsbury Easy No-Fuss Frosting, Mar.

Pop Secret Homestyle Popcorn, Nov.

Uno's Bread Pudding, Dec.

Food Safety

contaminants in water, Jun., p. 1

E. coli, *Salmonella* outbreaks, Mar., p. 1

food poisoning damage, Mar., p. 1, Jun., p. 8

Salmonella outbreak in eggs, Nov., p. 9

synthetic food dyes, Sept., p. 10

Gout

and coffee, Oct., p. 8

and sugars, Jan./Feb., p. 1

Healthy Cook Recipes

Apple hazelnut salad with gorgonzola crisps, Oct., p. 12

Bulgur chicken salad, Apr., p. 8

Cherry-almond clafoutis, Jul./Aug., p. 12

Chicken puttanesca, Sept., p. 12

Chicken tagine, Sept., p. 12

Chicken with cider mustard sauce, Oct., p. 12

Citrus shrimp salad, Mar., p. 12

Cream of broccoli soup, Jan./Feb., p. 12

Creamy lemon chicken, Sept., p. 12

Greek lentil stew, Jan./Feb., p. 12

Herbed chicken salad, Jun., p. 11

Honey-glazed nectarines, Jul./Aug., p. 12

Mushroom-rosemary orzo, Apr., p. 8

Pacific cod with citrus dressing, Mar., p. 12

Pan-seared wild salmon with citrus salsa, Mar., p. 12

Pepper, onion, & sweet potato frittata, Dec., p. 11

Port-poached plums, Jul./Aug., p. 12

Provençal tofu salad, May, p. 12

Quinoa stuffed peppers, May, p. 12

Roasted butternut squash, apples, & onions, Oct., p. 12

Roasted shrimp & cherry tomatoes, Dec., p. 11

Savory eggplant with lentils, Dec., p. 11

Sesame shrimp salad, Jun., p. 11

Sicilian caponata with whole wheat couscous, May, p. 12

Spicy black bean salad, Jun., p. 11

Spinach chickpea pasta, Apr., p. 8

Tilapia with granny smith remoulade, Oct., p. 12

Tortilla soup, Jan./Feb., p. 12

2010

White bean salad, Jun., p. 11
Yogurt Panna Cotta, Jul./Aug., p. 12

Heart Disease (see also "Fats and Oils")
atrial fibrillation and weight, caffeine, Sept., p. 9
and low-fat foods, Jun., p. 8
and red meat, Oct., p. 8
and sodium, Jan./Feb., p. 9, Apr., p. 1
stiff arteries and age, exercise, fish oil, potassium, saturated fat, sodium, weight, Oct., p. 1
and sugars, Jan./Feb., p. 1
warning signs of heart attack, Jun., p. 8
and whole grains, Nov., p. 8

Herbs (see "Supplements")

High Blood Pressure (see also "Heart Disease")
and alcohol, exercise, Apr., p. 1
and potassium, Sept., p. 1
and salt, Jan./Feb., p. 2, 9, Apr., p. 1
and stiff arteries, Oct., p. 1
and sugars, Jan./Feb., p. 1, Jul./Aug., p. 8
and whole grains, Oct., p. 8

High Fructose Corn Syrup (see "Sugars")

Kidneys

kidney disease and B vitamins, Jun., p. 12
kidney stones and fruits, vegetables, Sept., p. 1

Supersized restaurant portions, Sept., p. 13
Whole grain finds & frauds, Mar., p. 13
Xtreme Eating 2010 (worst restaurant foods), Jun., p. 13

Refined Grains

"Name that Food" quiz, Jan./Feb., p. 10

Restaurant Industry (see also "Ratings of Brand-Name and Restaurant Foods")

pressure to eat, May, p. 1
sandwich, salad, soup chains, Nov., p. 12
sodium in restaurant foods, Apr., p. 1

Right Stuff (back cover)

Aprium and Pluot, Jun.
Cranberries, Dec.
IHOP For Me Menu, Jan./Feb.
Mangoes, Apr.
McCain Crinkle Cut Sweet Potato Fries, May
Organic Bistro Whole Life Meals, Oct.
Pomi Chopped Tomatoes, Mar.
Rice Select Whole Wheat Orzo and DeLallo 100% Organic Orzo, Jul./Aug.
Star Kist Low Sodium Albacore White or Chunk Tuna, Nov.
Whole Foods 365 Almond Butter, Sept.

Salmonella (see "Food Safety")

Supplements (see also "Vitamins and Minerals")

arginine and stiff arteries, Oct., p. 1
garlic and cholesterol, Jul./Aug., p. 9
gingko and memory, Mar., p. 9, Jul./Aug., p. 9
probiotics and digestive health, yeast infections, urinary tract infections, Apr., p. 9
weight and açai, Alli, Sensa, SlimShots, Dec., p. 1

Teeth

periodontitis and omega-3 fats, Dec., p. 10

Triglycerides

and sugars, Jan./Feb., p. 1, Jun., p. 12

Vitamins and Minerals

B vitamins and kidney disease, Jun., p. 12
calcium, vitamin D and bones, Nov., p. 1
folic acid and breast cancer, Jul./Aug., p. 1
folic acid and colon polyps, Mar., p. 9
folic acid excess and memory, Sept., p. 1
magnesium and diabetes, Sept., p. 1
misleading claims for vitamins and breast cancer, energy, hair, heart, immunity, etc. Jul./Aug., p. 9
potassium and blood pressure, Apr., p. 1, Sept., p. 1
potassium and kidney stones, Sept., p. 1
potassium bicarbonate for bones, Nov., p. 1
selenium and LDL cholesterol, Jan./Feb., p. 9
vitamin B-12, folic acid, and memory, Sept., p. 1
vitamin D and bones, Sept., p. 1
vitamin D and colon cancer, Apr., p. 7, Sept., p. 1
vitamin D and diabetes, Oct., p. 8
vitamin D and falls, Nov., p. 1
vitamin D and the flu, May, p. 7
vitamin D and pancreatic cancer, Sept., p. 1
vitamin D and rare cancers, Jul./Aug., p. 8
vitamins A, K, magnesium, sodium and bone strength, Nov., p. 1

Water Safety

and atrazine, disinfection byproducts, drugs, germs, lead, perchlorate, Jun., p. 1

Weight and Weight Loss

3,500 calories per pound, Jun., p. 8
and atrial fibrillation, Sept., p. 1
belly fat and whole grains, Nov., p. 8
and breast cancer, Jul./Aug., p. 1
calories in sandwiches, Jun., p. 8
and diabetes, Jan./Feb., p. 9
and exercise, May, p. 7
fat cells size vs. number, Dec., p. 10
food industry and overeating, May, p. 1
and genes, exercise, May, p. 1
and grain foods, Nov., p. 1
and leptin, genes, epigenetics, temperature, viruses, gut bacteria, surgery, Dec., p. 1
and sleep, Jul./Aug., p. 8, Nov., p. 8
and snacking, May, p. 7
and stiff arteries, Oct., p. 1
and sugars, Jan./Feb., p. 1

Whole Grains

and belly fat, Nov., p. 9
and blood pressure, Oct., p. 8
brown rice and diabetes, Jul./Aug., p. 8
finds & frauds, Mar., p. 13

Memory

and exercise, Apr., p. 7
exercise and Parkinson's, Nov., p. 8
and ginkgo, Mar., p. 9, Jul./Aug., p. 9
and stiff arteries, Oct., p. 1
and vitamin B-12, folic acid, Sept., p. 1

Osteoporosis (see "Bones")

Overrated & Underrated Foods, May, p. 8

Probiotics

and antibiotics, immunity, regularity, Apr., p. 9

Quiz

The Bottom Line, Dec., p. 7
Name that Food, Jan./Feb., p. 10

Ratings of Brand-Name and Restaurant Foods

Coffee houses, Apr., p. 12
Frozen entrées, Dec., p. 12
Frozen novelties, Jul./Aug., p. 13
Frozen yogurt shops, May, p. 13
Meat and poultry guide, Oct., p. 13
Sandwich, Soup, Salad chains, Nov., p. 12
Soup, Jan./Feb., p. 13

Salt (see also "High Blood Pressure")

and blood pressure, heart attacks, kidneys, strokes, Jan./Feb., p. 9, Apr., p. 1
and osteoporosis, Apr., p. 1, Nov., p. 1
and stiff arteries, Apr., p. 1, Oct., p. 1
The Year of Salt, Jan./Feb., p. 2

Sleep

and hunger, insulin resistance, Jul./Aug., p. 8
and loss of muscle, fat, Nov., p. 8

Soy

and breast cancer, Mar., p. 9, Jul./Aug., p. 1

Stroke (see also "High Blood Pressure")

and atrial fibrillation, Sept., p. 9
and potassium, vitamin D, Sept., p. 1
and salt, Jan./Feb., p. 9, Apr., p. 1
and soft drinks, Jul./Aug., p. 8
and sitting, Sept., p. 9
and stiff arteries, Oct., p. 1

Sugars

and blood pressure, diabetes, gout, heart disease, obesity, and triglycerides, Jan./Feb., p. 1
and diabetes, Jun., p. 8
and HDL cholesterol, Jun., p. 12



The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), founded in 1971, is an independent nonprofit consumer health group. CSPI advocates honest food labeling and advertising, safer and more nutritious foods, and pro-health alcohol policies. CSPI's work is supported by *Nutrition Action Healthletter* subscribers and foundation grants. CSPI accepts no government or industry funding. *Nutrition Action Healthletter*, first published in 1974, accepts no advertising.



RIGHT STUFF

BERRY NICE



This is the time of year to grab some fresh **cranberries** before they disappear until next fall. Odds are, you don't think about proanthocyanidins when you see them.

Those are the phytochemicals in cranberries that seem to keep bacteria from sticking to the surfaces of bladder cells. They may explain why studies

find a lower risk of recurrent urinary tract infections in women who consume a cranberry juice drink every day.

But that's not the only reason to toss a couple of bags of cranberries into your cart. Cranberries offer a rich red tartness—and a nice dose of vitamin C—to many a dish.

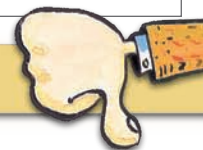
For a deliciously sweet-tart topping for buckwheat pancakes or oatmeal, simmer fresh cranberries for 10 to 15 minutes in orange juice and a little maple syrup. Or make a chutney by simmering fresh cranberries in water with mango, dried peaches, red onion, fresh minced ginger, and sugar to taste for 20 to 25 minutes. It's perfect with roasted chicken or spicy sautéed fish.

Then there's compote: Simmer fresh cranberries with raisins, prunes, and dried figs, pears, and apples for 20 to 25 minutes in apple cider with a stick of cinnamon and honey to taste. Mix with plain yogurt or eat as is.

Some tips for cranberry picking: Ripe cranberries should be shiny and plump. If you store them in a tightly-sealed plastic bag, they'll last for up to two months in the fridge or a year in the freezer. Just don't let frozen berries thaw before cooking or they'll end up soft and mushy.

Cranberries may not be sweet, but they have character to spare.

FOOD PORN



OH NO'S



"A simple but delicious baked dessert served warm with vanilla ice cream and topped with a memorable salty and sweet caramel sauce." That's how

Uno's menu describes its **Bread Pudding with a Salty Caramel Sauce**.

Memorable, indeed. Your fat cells won't soon forget the 900 calories' worth of bread pudding (cream, white flour, eggs, sugar, etc.), ice cream (milk, cream, sugar, corn syrup, natural and artificial vanilla flavor, etc.), and caramel sauce (sugar, cream, water, butter, and salt). Uno's Web site lists the calories as 450, hoping that few people will notice the "Servings 2." That's your only clue that the Nutrition Facts apply to just half the dessert. How clever! (If you live in an area where restaurants are required to divulge calories on the menu, you'll see the full 900 listed.)

And they aren't just any old calories. Nearly 500 of them come from fat, largely supplied by all that cream. There's enough to deliver 32 grams of saturated fat—1½ days' worth. Nothing like a little pudding putty to coat those artery walls, which won't forget this baby, either.

Speaking of blood vessels, it's not often that you find 660 milligrams of sodium in a dessert. But between the bread and the salty caramel sauce, Uno's gives your blood pressure a lift. Then there's the 10+ teaspoons of sugar that come with zero nutrients.

Bread pudding has been around for years, though not with ice cream and caramel sauce. Uno adds ice cream and sauces to nearly all of its desserts. That's what makes them stick around your midsection for years.

Uno Foods: (866) 600-8667

dish OF THE MONTH

Quick Spinach Salad

Mix 1 Tbs. of raspberry vinaigrette dressing with 1 Tbs. of fresh lemon juice and 1 tsp. of olive oil. Toss with a small bag of baby spinach and top with a handful of cut-up fruit (try red grapes and strawberries) and 1 or 2 Tbs. of nuts (try toasted sliced almonds).