

# Food Frauds That Can Wreck Your Diet

## Food Fraud: Caesar Salad

Some foods that we think are healthy can be sneaky little diet wreckers. University of Pittsburgh nutritionist Leslie Bonci, MPH, RD, shares a few of these "food frauds," starting with Caesar salad. Just a small bowl has 300-400 calories and 30 grams of fat, thanks to loads of dressing.

**Food Fix:** Use only 1 Tbs. dressing and 2 Tbs. tangy, Parmesan cheese.



## Food Fraud: Fresh Smoothies

That "healthy" berry blend at a smoothie shop can have a whopping 80 grams of sugar, 350 calories, no protein, and often, no fresh fruit. Fruit "concentrates" are often used instead of fresh fruit. And sorbet, ice cream, and sweeteners can make these no better than a milkshake.

**Food Fix:** Get the "small" cup. Ask for fresh fruit, low-fat yogurt, milk, or protein powder to blend in good nutrition

## Food Fraud: Energy Bars

Many of these are simply enhanced candy bars with more calories (up to 500) and a higher price tag. Their compact size also leaves many people unsatisfied. "Three bites and it's gone," says Bonci, who advises hungry athletes and dancers.

**Food Fix:** Choose bars that have 200 calories or less, at least 5 grams of fiber, and some protein, which helps provide energy when the sugar rush fades.

## Food Fraud: Chicken Burrito

With healthy beans and no red meat, what's the problem? About 1,000 calories and plenty of saturated fat. Cheese, sour cream, and the fat in the jumbo flour tortilla all contribute. And when the burrito is as big as your forearm, the serving is just too big.

**Food Fix:** Share one. Or try a soft taco with fajita-style grilled meats and veggies on a corn tortilla with tasty low-calorie salsa.

## Food Fraud: Diet Soda

Sugar-free soda may not be an effective "diet" aid after all. Some early studies have linked diet soda to weight gain. Does it prompt the body to crave more food? Or do diet soda drinkers believe it's OK for them to get the large fries? It's still not clear.

**Food Fix:** Mix seltzer water with juice for a low-calorie fizzy drink with no artificial sweeteners.

## Food Fraud: Enhanced Water

Vitamins are commonly added to bottled water and advertised on the front label. But some brands also add sugar, taking water from zero calories to as much as 125. "Often the vitamins don't contribute much," Bonci says, "but the calories can contribute a lot."

**Food Fix:** Refrigerating tap water may make it more appealing to family members. Or try packets of crystallized lemon to add flavor without calories.

## Food Fraud: 2% Milk

Two percent milk sounds healthier than "whole" milk. But it still has more than *half the saturated fat of whole milk*. Here's what's in a cup of milk:

Whole Milk (3.25%) = 150 cal., 8g fat, 5g sat. fat

Reduced-fat (2%) = 130 cal., 5g fat, 3g sat. fat

Skim (nonfat) = 80 cal., 0g fat, 0g sat. fat

**Food Fix:** If you like whole milk, blend it with 2% for a while, then 1%, then skim, until you get used to the taste of nonfat milk.

### **Food Fraud: Iceberg Lettuce**

This popular lettuce is big on crunch but a big "zero" when it comes to vitamins and flavor. And its boring taste leads many people to overdo it on the dressing.

**Food Fix:** Add spinach or arugula to the mix. Crumble 2 tablespoons (100 calories) of blue cheese or feta on top. Then splash the salad with a little oil and vinegar to spread flavor without a lot of calories.

### **Food Fraud: 2% Milk Latte**

It's tempting to choose "reduced-fat" milk in a latte and reward yourself with whipped cream on top. Sadly, this trade-off still adds up to 580 calories and 15 grams of saturated fat in a 20 ounce white chocolate mocha. That's worse than a quarter-pound burger with cheese.

**Food Fix:** A sweetened, frothy beverage is a diet splurge. Limit the damage with nonfat (skim) milk and no whipped cream. You'll avoid 130 calories and two-thirds of the bad fat.

### **Food Fraud: Turkey Hot Dogs**

The nutritional content of turkey hot dogs varies from brand to brand -- and some are real turkeys when it comes to health. It may say "less fat" on the front label, but when you check the fine print on the back, you find there's still plenty of fat left in each sausage.

**Food Fix:** Compare nutrition labels for the lowest fat content; there are some really good choices now available. Or only eat them a few times a year.

### **Food Fraud: Breakfast Muffins**

Muffins masquerade as a healthy choice for breakfast. They beat doughnuts, they're still mainly sugary little cakes of refined flour. One store-bought muffin can hit 500 calories with 11 teaspoons of sugar.

**Food Fix:** Go no larger than 2 1/2 inches in diameter. Or look for 100-calorie muffins at the store. They limit calories, and some brands are a surprisingly good source of whole grains and fiber.



### **Food Fraud: Low-Fat Granola**

The low-fat version of this crunchy cereal has only 10% fewer calories and is still full of sugar. Plus, the low-fat label can easily lead you to overeat. A study at Cornell University found that people ate 49% more granola when they thought it was low fat -- easily blowing past the measly 10% calorie savings.

**Food Fix:** Look for low-sugar, whole-grain cereal, and sweeten it with fresh fruit.

### **Food Fraud: Low-Fat Yogurt**

Too often this nutritional superstar — rich in protein and calcium — contains shocking amounts of added sugar. Some brands add 30 or more grams of fructose, sucrose, or other sweeteners.

**Food Fix:** Six ounces should be 90-130 calories and under 20 grams of sugar. Avoid sugary "fruit on the bottom," or blend sweetened yogurt with plain, nonfat yogurt.

### **Food Fraud: Multigrain**

When you see "multigrain" or "seven grain" on bread, pasta, or waffles, flip the package over and check the nutrition label. Even with more than one type of grain, the product could be made largely from refined grains — such as white flour — which have been stripped of fiber and many nutrients.

**Food Fix:** Look for "100% whole grain" as the first ingredient. Or choose the brand with more fiber.

### **Food Fraud: Light Olive Oil**

Anything labeled "light" is enticing when you're watching your weight. But often the food is not what you expect. Light olive oil, for instance, has the same calorie and fat content as other types — it's just lighter in color and taste.

**Food Fix:** Some light foods do provide significant calorie savings. Compare the labels in the store.

### **Food Fraud: Added Omega-3**

Some yogurt, milk, eggs, cereal, and other foods boast of added omega-3. But most don't contain the kinds of omega-3 best known to help your heart — EPA and DHA. Or there's only a smidgen — about as much as in one bite of salmon. Instead, they contain ALA from vegetable sources. It's not clear if omega-3 from ALA is as beneficial as DHA/EPA.

**Food Fix:** Try 6 ounces of salmon. It has 100 times more omega-3 than is in a serving of fortified yogurt. Vegetarians could consider algae-derived omega-3 supplements.

### **Food Fraud: Iced Tea**

The antioxidants in iced tea don't make it a health food. Too much added sugar can turn a tall glass into a health hazard. A 20-ounce bottle can have more than 200 calories and 59 grams of sugar.

**Food Fix:** Skip "sweet tea" in favor of unsweetened iced tea. Lemon or artificial sweeteners add zing without calories. Herbal and berry teas taste mildly sweet without sugar.



### **Food Fraud: Microwave Popcorn**

The word "snack" can be a little misleading on microwave popcorn. One popular brand packs 9 grams of bad fat, including 6 grams of trans fat, into each "snack size" bag.

**Food Fix:** Compare nutrition labels and get a lower-fat popcorn that has no trans fat at all. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese or low-salt spice blends for added flavor without a lot of fat.

### **Food Fraud: Salty Toppings**

Processed artichoke hearts, chickpeas, and olives are just a few of the salt shockers lurking on the salad bar. To avoid an unhealthy amount of sodium, limit anything that comes out of a can. Also pass up cured meats. Choose beans or tuna, but not both.

**Food Fix:** Radishes, bell peppers, cucumbers, and other fresh vegetables are low in sodium. Rinse canned beans to remove a lot of the salt.

### **Food Fraud: Cole Slaw**

Cabbage can be dandy for weight loss, but cole slaw can be a diet disaster. At one popular restaurant, a small cup (4.5 ounces) has 260 calories and 21 grams of fat — a third of most people's daily limit — thanks to copious mayonnaise.

**Food Fix:** Some places make a healthier slaw, so ask for nutrition information. At home, try low-fat mayonnaise or mix with nonfat yogurt.

### **Food Fraud: A Little Trans Fat**

One cinnamon roll can have 2 grams of trans fat — hitting the daily limit for this unhealthy type of fat before you have the second one. Pastries, cookies, and crackers often contain trans fat — and have ridiculously small serving sizes. And in a trick of labeling, less than 0.5 grams per serving can be labeled "trans-fat free." Eating too many servings may add up to too much trans fat when you think you're not getting any.

**Food Fix:** Check the back label for trans fat per serving. Don't eat out of the bag or box. Doing so leads to overeating.

### **Food Fraud: Banana Chips**

Deep-fried bananas are probably not what the doctor envisioned when she told you to eat more fruits and veggies. These don't look greasy, but just one ounce has 145 calories, 9 grams of fat, and 8 grams of saturated fat — about the same as a fast food hamburger.

**Food Fix:** Try a fresh banana: four times more food, 0 grams of fat, all for about 100 calories.

### **Food Fraud: Cracker Sandwiches**

Some cracker sandwiches now say "whole grain" — a step in the right direction. But what you see on the front label may be only a tiny portion of what you eat. When a whole grain does not appear in the first three ingredients, there's not much of it. "Wheat flour" is usually just a different name for refined, white flour — a name intended to sound healthier than it is and fool customers.

**Food Fix:** Limit portions. Or keep a low-fat cracker like a crisp bread and peanut butter in your desk drawer.