

## Q+A

# Your nutrition questions, answered!

Should you dump bread from your diet? Can cravings be prevented? Is it really possible to prepare a sensible dinner in 20 minutes? BHG gets the lowdown from leading experts. Their insights might surprise you—and change the way you eat forever.

BY SALLY WADYKA



**Q: WHEN I GET HOME AFTER A LONG DAY, I'M TOO TIRED TO DO MUCH COOKING. GOT ANY HEALTHY SHORTCUTS I CAN TRY?**

**A:** Good news: There is a delicious and doable middle ground between a 10-second PB&J and a 4-hour coq au vin, says Leslie Bonci, a registered dietitian and director of sports nutrition at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. One of her favorite time-saving tricks is to increase the surface area of food to make it cook more quickly. For example, if you're in the mood for roasted sweet potatoes or carrots, cut them into chunks before putting them in the oven and they'll be tender in half the time. Pound boneless pork chops until they're ¼ inch thick, place them in a hot skillet, and they'll be ready to eat in minutes.

If you have extra time to cook on weekends, make it count by knocking out some prep work for the days ahead. For example, instead of browning just ½ pound of ground beef for Sunday's tacos, cook 2 pounds and use the leftovers on Monday and Tuesday in tomato sauce and shepherd's pie.

And don't feel as though you have to make everything from scratch. Swing by the supermarket for a hot rotisserie chicken, then head home and make just the side dishes. Or try incorporating

frozen precooked ingredients such as brown rice and shrimp into your healthy meals.

If your long days leave you too zonked to log any stove time, consider investing in a slow cooker. Few things in life are more comforting than coming home to a warm meal. At [BHG.com/easydinner](http://BHG.com/easydinner) you'll find 29 simple and nourishing slow-cooker recipes with fewer than 400 calories per serving.

**Q: MY FAMILY WOULD LIKE TO SPEND LESS AT THE GROCERY STORE. IS IT POSSIBLE TO SAVE MONEY AND STILL EAT RIGHT?**

**A:** A strict budget doesn't have to stand between you and a healthy diet, assures Tara Gidus, a registered dietitian in Orlando. One key piece of advice: Don't skip the produce department. Although some folks believe that processed foods (such as boxed mashed potatoes) are a better deal than fresh fruits and vegetables (such as whole russets), research shows the opposite to be true. Fresh produce often yields more servings by weight, and because it retains all its fiber and fluid, it's more filling, too. Just avoid buying more than your family can eat. "Allowing food to spoil is like throwing money away," Bonci says. To that end, plan your

PHOTO: ISTOCK





meals so you use the most perishable items (such as tomatoes) first and the hardier fare (like broccoli) later in the week. And stick to what's in season—you'll pay a premium for blueberries right now, but you can get citrus fruits for a steal.

On the other hand, when it comes to pantry and freezer staples, think long-term and stock up on sale items, even if you don't plan to use them right away. Beans, whole wheat pasta, brown rice—all are smart buys. When you finally get a hankering for your delicious homemade hummus, you'll have spent just pennies per serving.

Also, understand that convenience usually comes at a cost. For example, you can save 5 cents an ounce if you pick up a 32-oz. carton of strawberry yogurt and portion it out yourself instead of splurging on 6-oz. cups. Tossing together a handful of nuts and dried fruits is much cheaper than buying premade trail mix. Over time, these little DIY moves can save you a bundle.

**Q: MOST OF MY MEALS ARE PRETTY HEALTHY, BUT CRAVINGS ALWAYS GET ME. HOW DO I RESIST THE CUPCAKES AT OFFICE PARTIES?**



**A:** In many cases, cravings are a sign of an empty stomach. "When you're feeling ravenous, you're apt to grab whatever food is around—even if you know it's not a healthy choice," Gidus says. So be realistic about your appetite. Maybe those nutritious salads you've been eating for lunch aren't filling you

up. (Try adding slices of grilled chicken, steamed tofu, or a hard-boiled egg.) And don't fear all snacks. Nibbling low-fat microwave popcorn, a handful of toasted almonds, or a cluster of red grapes with light string cheese can keep you nourished between meals and make those cupcakes seem much less enticing. Still tempted? Know that cravings—unlike true hunger—often pass, Gidus says. Take a few deep breaths and ask yourself if you really want to eat that treat. If you do decide to indulge (you're only human, after all), savor a small sample. Research has found that pleasure diminishes after the first few bites.

**Q: GOING OUT TO EAT IS MY DOWNFALL! WHAT ARE SOME THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR ON THE MENU?**

**A:** Don't get bogged down by menu jargon. Know the real meaning of these terms and you'll be on your way to ordering a healthy meal, Bonci says.

**Lightly breaded:** This phrase can make a dish sound more healthful than it is. "The amount of breading is less important than how the food is cooked," Bonci explains. In many cases, light breading is followed by deep-frying.

Ask about the prep method before you order.

**Wrap:** A favorite among weight-conscious diners, wrap sandwiches aren't always a surefire selection.

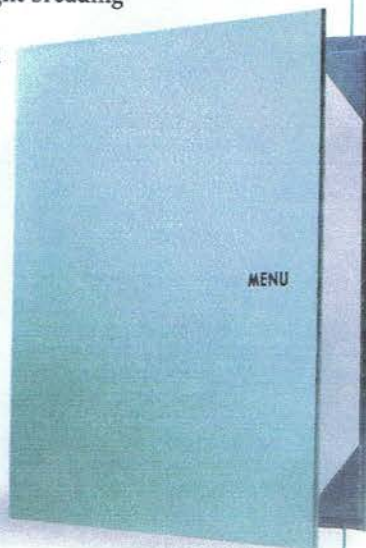
"A 10-inch wrap can have more calories than two slices of bread," Bonci says. If you can't eyeball the size of the wrap, consider ordering your sandwich on whole wheat toast instead.

**Baked:** The best-case scenario is that the food is simply placed on a baking sheet and heated until done.

But this term also can hint at a deep-dish style of cooking that uses creamy, high-fat ingredients. So consider the word that follows. Baked salmon? Great choice. Baked lasagna? An indulgence at best.

**Roasted:** This usually means the food is cooked in dry heat without a lot of added fat, a good sign. But if the menu says the food is topped with sauce, ask for the sauce on the side and use it sparingly.

**Vinaigrette:** Vinegar is low-cal and fat-free, but the same can't be said for vinaigrette. In many cases, this popular dressing is mostly oil, so order it on the side—just as you would a creamy dressing.



25

Daily grams of fiber women need to control their cholesterol, heart disease risk, and blood sugar. Studies suggest it's better to get fiber from whole foods, including fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, rather than processed foods with fiber additives (such as inulin).



## How can I keep my healthful recipes from tasting like “health food”?

A few secret-weapon ingredients can elevate a ho-hum meal into one that nourishes your body and soul, says Elizabeth Elliott, R.D., a nutrition specialist in the *Better Homes and Gardens*® Test Kitchen. And amazing flavor isn't all you'll get—many of her favorite add-ins deliver health perks, too.



**1 Toasted nuts and seeds:** After 5–10 minutes in a 350°F oven, nuts and seeds turn fragrant and flavorful. Almonds and walnuts add pleasing crunch to oatmeal and chicken salad, while cashews and peanuts lend depth to veggie stir-fries. Use sunflower and pumpkin seeds to put the finishing touch on salads and soups. Just remember that nuts, while rich in healthy oils, are calorie-dense. Chop them to stretch small amounts.

**2 Low-fat buttermilk:** Despite its decadent-sounding name, this dairy product won't derail your diet. Use it in place of oil or mayo in dressings, or as a base for meat marinades—its mild acidity tenderizes without toughening. Go to [BHG.com/tandoori](http://BHG.com/tandoori) to get our recipe for buttermilk-marinated Indian-style chicken.

**3 Balsamic vinegar:** Sure, this aged condiment makes a mean salad

dressing. But you'll get even more from the vinegar if you reduce it in a saucepan over low heat until it's thick and syrupy. Spoon the sweet-tart reduction onto homemade pizza or, for a delectable dessert, over fresh fruit.

**4 Pure maple syrup:** Who needs pancakes? A drizzle of this antioxidant-rich sweet stuff can balance the tartness in your grapefruit or heighten the caramelized flavors of roasted veggies such as carrots and Brussels sprouts. Brush a little on salmon after broiling, and you'll be hooked.

**5 Low-fat Greek yogurt:** Consider this your fix for boring baked potatoes—it's creamier and higher in protein than light sour cream. It also makes a satisfying thickener for fruit smoothies and pureed soups.

**6 Fresh herbs:** They're often touted in low-sodium diets because, like salt, they make flavors pop. Don't stop at savory dishes, though. Try adding fresh thyme or rosemary to whole grain pancake or muffin batter with a bit of lemon zest, or stir mint or basil into sugar-free fruit preserves.

**7 Roasted garlic:** Raw cloves have a strong bite and can be a pain to peel and mince. During roasting, however, they mellow into a flavorful paste you can easily squeeze into pasta sauce, sandwiches, dips, and more. Turn to page 155 for roasting instructions.

**8 Panko bread crumbs:** These flaky bread crumbs add major crunch to recipes, no deep fryer necessary. Use them to coat skinless chicken cutlets and sliced veggies before baking (and after dipping the food in a binder such as egg), or to give your healthful casseroles a guilt-free crust.

PHOTO: JEFF HARRIS



# Q Do these diet villains deserve their bad reputations?



**Gluten:** You'll find this grain protein in everything from sliced bread to salad dressing. Unless you're among the small fraction of Americans who have celiac disease or nonceliac gluten sensitivity, there's no reason to avoid it, says BHG nutrition adviser Melina Jampolis, M.D. Confirm any suspected gluten problems with your doctor. Gluten-free diets aren't easy to maintain and, unless managed carefully, can leave you low on critical nutrients.



**Salt:** While Americans eat more sodium than most health experts recommend, avoiding the tabletop shaker probably won't make much of a dent in your diet. "Seventy percent of our sodium comes from processed foods and restaurant meals," Jampolis says. The happy translation: You can slash your salt intake by simply fixing more meals at home. (Just watch out for high sodium levels in certain ingredients, such as chicken broth.)



**High-fructose corn syrup:** Research has linked this refined sweetener to a heightened risk of obesity and fatty liver disease. However, there's not enough evidence to say for sure whether corn syrup is worse than other caloric sweeteners. Jampolis notes that in high enough amounts, even cane sugar and honey can lead to weight gain and related health issues. Enjoy sweetened treats and beverages in moderation.



**Trans fat:** Steer clear of this manmade substance. Used in baked and fried foods to prolong their shelf life, it wreaks havoc on cholesterol levels. Health experts advise capping intake at 2 grams a day, a job that may require some sleuthing. "Food manufacturers can say a product is trans fat-free if it contains less than .5 grams per serving," Jampolis says. Stay under the limit by avoiding foods that contain partially hydrogenated oil, a common trans fat alias.

## 50%

The portion of every meal that should be fruits and vegetables, according to the latest guidelines from the USDA. Visit [choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov) for tips on hitting the target.

**Q: I'M ALL FOR EATING HEALTHY, BUT MY FAMILY IS VERY PICKY.**

**HOW DO I GET THEM TO STOP TREATING ME LIKE A SHORT-ORDER COOK?**

**A:** Don't make separate meals; make one and serve it in a deconstructed state, Gidus suggests. For example, if you're having salad at dinner, set out a bowl of plain greens and have family members add their own carrots, cucumber slices, and other ingredients. If you're having pasta, let them sprinkle Parmesan cheese and fresh basil on top. This allows everyone to tweak the flavors to his or her liking. And for younger kids, it provides a sense of autonomy that defuses picky-eating power struggles.

Going forward, ask your family to help plan healthy meals—they might be more open to menus when they have a hand in the design, Gidus says. And don't give up on broadening their palates. "Many kids don't learn to love new foods until they're exposed to them a number of times," Gidus says.

PHOTOS: MARTY BALDWIN



## What does the lingo on food labels really mean?

"Flashy claims on the front of packages can be misleading," says registered dietitian Bonnie Taub-Dix, author of *Read It Before You Eat It* (Plume). "In many cases, you need to read the nutrition information on the back to find out what's really inside." Sharpen your translation skills with the guide below.

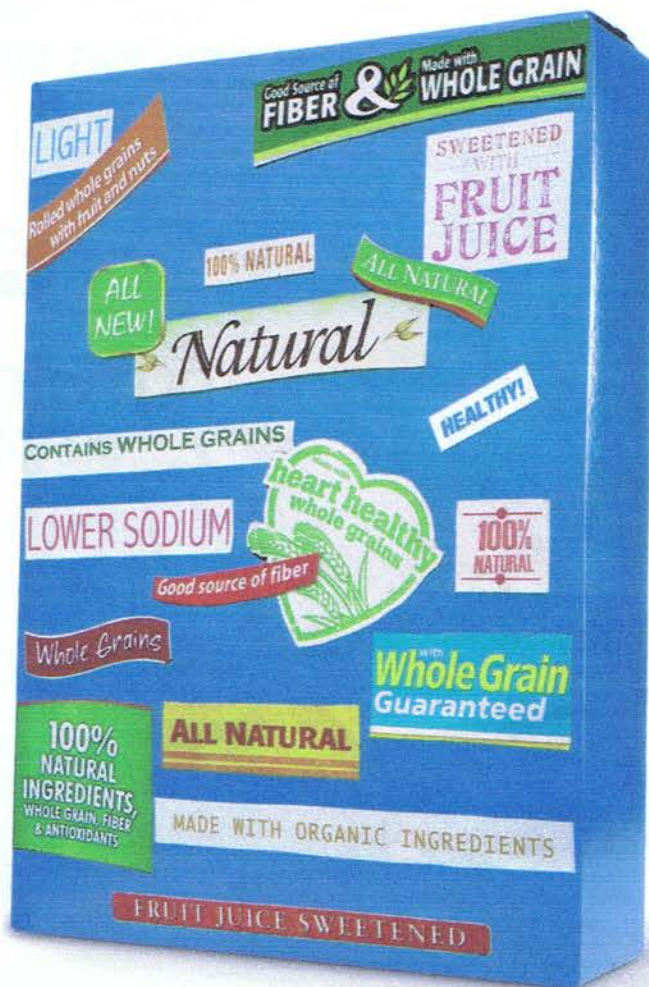
**Light:** A food earns this ID when it contains less than half the fat of a comparable product or one-third fewer calories, according to rules set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. But Taub-Dix says the comparative term can muddy your judgment—light ice cream might be lower-cal than its counterpart, but that doesn't mean it's good for you. Evaluate nutrition information on its own merits before buying.

**Natural:** It's little more than a buzzword—and far broader than many people realize, Taub-Dix says. Many iffy food additives, such as MSG, technically are natural because their components occur in nature. And if you eat enough of them, many innocent-sounding natural ingredients (like cheese) can undermine health.

**Made with organic ingredients:** This claim, regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, means at least 70 percent of the product's ingredients are organic. (Foods that display the USDA Organic seal must contain at least 95 percent organic ingredients.) While organic foods contain fewer man-made chemicals—a win for folks concerned about exposure—they aren't necessarily more nutritious. "Organic potato chips are still potato chips," Taub-Dix says.

**Lower sodium:** Like *light*, *lower sodium* is a comparative term defined by the FDA; it means the food has, at most, 25 percent less sodium than the fully loaded version. However, some reduced-sodium foods still pack a salty wallop. If you're on a low-salt diet, look for the term *low sodium* (without the *-er*), which means the food contains no more than 140 mg of sodium per serving.

**Good source of fiber:** This phrase, another regulated by the FDA, means the food contains 10–19 percent of the recommended daily value of fiber per serving. ("Excellent" sources contain at least 20 percent.) But as noted on page 182, not all sources of fiber are created equal. "Fiber that comes from additives might not be as beneficial as fiber from whole foods," Taub-Dix says.



**Sweetened with fruit juice:** What could be wrong with fruit juice? For starters, it might be just one of several sweeteners, Taub-Dix says. And even if juice is the star, the food itself might offer little benefit. Keep cookies and candy to a minimum, no matter how they get their flavor.

**Contains whole grains:** Whole grains deliver more fiber and nutrients than their refined counterparts, but how much are you really getting in that loaf of bread? "The amount might be too small to provide any benefit," Taub-Dix says. Instead, choose foods labeled "100 percent whole grain," which means they have only the good stuff.

PHOTO: JEFF HARRIS



## Can meat be *healthful and affordable*?

You don't need to spend big (or become a vegetarian) to score a nutritious centerpiece for your family's meals, registered dietitian Tara Gidus says. For proof, look no further than these four cuts. They're versatile and budget-friendly, and each serving contains fewer than 240 calories, no more than 11 grams of fat, and at least 23 grams of protein.

**Whole chicken** Enjoy the big pieces for an effortlessly tasty dinner, shred leftovers for quick quesadillas, and use the bones and scraps to make the best darn soup you've ever tasted. Go to [BHG.com/slurp](http://BHG.com/slurp) for our top chicken soup recipes. White meat, 4-oz. serving: 186 cal, 4 g fat, 35 g pro. Dark meat, 4-oz. serving: 232 cal, 11 g fat, 31 g pro.

**Flank steak** True, it's a bit tougher than pricier cuts, but flank steak tenderizes nicely when marinated or when cooked with liquid in a covered pot or skillet. Slice across the grain for mouthwatering results. Go to [BHG.com/flanksteak](http://BHG.com/flanksteak) to find recipes. 3-oz. serving: 180 cal, 9 g fat, 23 g pro.

**Cod** This not-too-fishy fish easily takes on the flavor of surrounding seasonings, making it the perfect catch for seafood newbies. Bake it with a simple coating of bread crumbs and fresh herbs, or go to [BHG.com/cod](http://BHG.com/cod) and try one of our eight tasty recipes. 4-oz. serving: 119 cal, 1 g fat, 26 g pro.

**Pork chops** Boneless and bone-in are both healthy choices. For moist, flavorful chops, cook until the internal temperature reaches 145°F, then let rest for 5 minutes. (It's OK if the meat still looks a little pink, food safety experts at the USDA say.) 3-oz. serving: about 180 cal, 8 g fat, 24 g pro. ■

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EVERY DAY <sup>of the</sup> MONTH

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