

# what's healthier?



You already know that not all food options are created equal. But in some cases, the better choice may just surprise you. Here, top experts help us make the smartest picks. BY SALLY WADYKA

From the minute you roll out of bed, there are nutritional decisions to be made, from which cereal to choose (the sugary one or bran flakes?) to whether to order a salad at lunch. These are no-brainers. “But some choices aren’t so clear-cut,” says Tara Gidus, R.D., a nutritionist in Orlando, Florida. “So-called ‘healthy’ foods can pack loads of calories, while some treats aren’t the diet derailers you’d expect.” And making the right call often means weighing your own needs. If you’re trying to lose a few pounds, you might go with the lower-cal option. But if calories aren’t your top concern, then the one with the most nutrients is your best bet. To make the sleuthing process easier, we dug up the answers to common diet dilemmas.

## 1 glazed doughnut... or bagel with cream cheese?

Grab the doughnut! “While both are made with white flour, which offers little in the nutrient department, bagels are much bigger. One can be the calorie equivalent of five servings of bread,” says Kristine Clark, Ph.D., R.D., the director of sports nutrition at Penn State University. Even a medium bagel contains 320 calories—and that’s *before* the schmear of cream cheese (2 tablespoons has 150 calories).

A glazed doughnut has only 260 calories and 2 fewer grams of fat than the bagel with cream cheese. Pair the pastry with a glass of lowfat milk to avoid a sugar crash. If the bagel is beckoning, have half a whole-grain one with a light spread of peanut butter.

## 2 french toast... or pancakes?

These brunch favorites boast a similar nutritional profile: A single slice of French toast has about 150 calories and



Top French toast with fruit and powdered sugar



One potato skin serves up 3 grams of filling fiber



7 grams of fat, while a six-inch pancake comes in at 175 calories and 7 grams of fat.

"But French toast's egg coating adds protein," says Gidus, "and gives it more flavor and moisture than a pancake." That means you're also less likely to drench the bread in syrup, which adds an additional 100 calories for 2 tablespoons.

**3 potato skins...or chicken fingers?**

That depends. If those cheesy spuds are also loaded with bacon (140 calories, 9 grams of fat each), opt for the chicken fingers (100 calories, 5 grams of fat each). But if they're topped with broccoli or scallions, feel free to indulge in moderation. "The potato skin and vegetables provide fiber, potassium, and vitamin C,

Many cereals are fortified with **minerals** that women fall short on, such as iron.

and the cheese adds calcium and protein," says Lisa Dorfman, R.D., the director of sports medicine nutrition and performance at the University of Miami.

The chicken fingers, on the other hand, can serve up a dose of preservatives. "This deep-fried appetizer is often made of chopped-up chicken mixed with artificial coloring and flavoring," says Dorfman. That's reason to cry fowl.

**4 nuts...or dried fruit?**

Nutritionists love nuts, so it's no surprise that they're the vending machine victor. Although this nosh is higher in fat and calories (168 calories and 14 grams of fat per ounce versus dried fruit's 69 calories and no fat), it's also packed with vitamin E, fiber, and protein. Plus, most of the fat is the heart-healthy monounsaturated kind.

Another reason to go nuts: A handful of walnuts or pistachios can help you lose weight. Researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, found that people who snacked on nuts as part of a three-month long diet shed 4 pounds more than those who had carbohydrate-rich treats instead. A sweet compromise? "Mix in some dried fruit with your nuts," suggests Clark, "for the best of both worlds."



A 1-ounce serving is 14 walnuts or 49 pistachios

**5 smoothie...or cereal with fruit?**

Although both options are filled with antioxidants and other nutrients, our experts voted for the cereal as the better breakfast option. "Many cereals are fortified with vitamins and minerals that women fall short on, such as iron, calcium, and folic acid," says Dorfman. She recommends looking for a brand with whole grains listed as the first ingredient and no more than 9 grams of sugar per serving.

If you're a smoothie fan, make yours with whole fruit, nonfat Greek yogurt, and soy or nonfat milk instead of juice, which adds extra sugar. When you're out, stick with a 16-ounce size (or smaller) and request a scoop of protein powder to give your sip staying power.



Pick a cereal with at least 3 grams of fiber per serving

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: VALERIE JANSEN/STOCKFOOD; RITA PANA/GETTY IMAGES; FOODCOLLECTION/STOCKFOOD



**6 bloody mary... or mimosa?**

Toast to the Bloody Mary for better health. The juice in both of these cocktails gives you a nutrient boost (vitamin C, potassium, and vitamin A), but the tomato juice in the Bloody Mary contains less sugar than a mimosa's OJ.

"Tomatoes also have lycopene, shown to protect against cancer and heart disease," says Clark. And at 125 calories per 10-ounce glass, the Bloody Mary contains 25 fewer calories than an 8-ounce mimosa. "Order it



Order bread instead of a higher-calorie wrap

spicy, so you'll sip it more slowly," suggests Clark.

**7 turkey sandwich... or tuna?**

Gobble up the turkey. Request mustard instead of mayo, and you'll get just 350 calories and 5 grams of fat, compared with tuna salad's 680 calories and 41 grams of fat. "Mayonnaise is loaded with calories—and half a cup of tuna salad can pack in 3 tablespoons," says Gidus. The excess of dressing also means there's less tuna in the sandwich, so it contains half as much protein as the turkey.

In the mood for fish? Order the Italian version, which usually contains olive oil, lemon juice, and capers, to get tuna's omega-3s for a fraction of the fat. Or make your own, subbing olive oil for mayo, says Gidus. "Instead of albacore, opt for light tuna, which contains less harmful mercury."

**8 chicken caesar salad...or grilled chicken sandwich?**

The sandwich. Add the word "Caesar" to a salad, and you've got a diet disaster. With cheese, croutons, and a creamy dressing—this seemingly healthy staple is four times

higher in fat than the sandwich. The Caesar weighs in at 490 calories with a whopping 32 grams of fat, compared to 340 calories and just 7 grams of fat for the sandwich.

While you are getting a few greens with your fat infusion, a Caesar salad is usually made with Romaine lettuce, which isn't as nutrient-rich as darker greens. "Instead of fries, order a side of sautéed spinach with your sandwich," suggests Gidus.

**9 chicken thighs... or pork chop?**

The latter wins by a landslide: While chicken has a reputation for being the leanest meat choice, that only holds true for skinless breasts. If you choose a lean cut of pork—like a loin or a trimmed chop—you'll get about 100 calories and 2 grams of fat per 3-ounce serving.

The same size serving of dark-meat chicken thighs weighs in with 177 calories and 9 grams of fat. The amount of protein is almost equal, so feel free to add some pork to your dinner routine (just not in the form of greasy ribs or bacon!).

**10 soft pretzel... or hotdog?**

From a calorie-counter's perspective, these two ballpark snacks are nearly tied (460 calories for the hotdog versus 488 for the pretzel), but the experts point to the pretzel as the healthiest option.

"That's because the hotdog has 21 grams of fat, plus more than 1,000 milligrams of sodium," says Gidus. The pretzel, by comparison, has 4 grams of fat and 557 milligrams of sodium. What's worse: A study published in the journal *Circulation* found

Brush off some of the salt before digging in



that eating just one hotdog—or 2 ounces of processed meat—a day increased heart disease risk by 42 percent.

SALLY WADYKA, a Boulder, Colorado-based writer, can't resist a fresh glazed doughnut.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: DAN GOLDBERG/GETTY IMAGES; FOTO IMAGERIE LLC/STOCKFOOD; WESTERMANN/STOCKFOOD

“ Tomatoes also have lycopene, shown to protect against cancer. ”

