

Empty Calories Count

Empty calories are calories from solid fats or added sugars. They add calories to foods and drinks but provide few or no nutrients. Many of the foods and drinks we eat have empty calories.

Solid Fats

Fats that are solid at room temperature are solid fats. Some solid fats are found naturally in foods. Others are added when foods are processed or added when made at home or a restaurant. You should try to limit the amount of solid fats in your diet.

Foods with solid fats include:

- Butter and products made with butter (cakes, cookies, and pastries)
- Fat or marbling in meat products
- Shortening
- Margarine
- Whole milk products
- Fried foods
- Poultry skin
- Some oils like coconut or palm oil

Added Sugars

Added sugars are sugars and syrups that are added when foods or drinks are made. Eating or drinking too many added sugars can lead to serious health issues. Obesity, type 2 diabetes, swollen liver, heart disease, weak bones, poor dental health and cognitive decline are a few.

Foods and drinks with added sugar include:

- Sweetened applesauce
- Canned fruit packed in syrup
- Fruit snacks
- Sports drinks
- Many specialty coffee and tea flavored drinks
- Candy
- Cookies
- Sugar-sweetened cereals
- Certain fruit-flavored drinks
- Sweetened alcoholic drinks
- Pasta sauces
- Granola bars
- Yogurt

High Calorie Drinks

You may not feel hungry after drinking a high calorie drink. The feeling won't last long. A 6-ounce glass of orange juice has about twice as many calories as an orange. The orange takes longer to eat and will keep you satisfied longer than the juice. The fiber in the orange will slow the time it takes your body to digest that food. Plus, eating an orange lets you enjoy texture and juiciness.

The amount of these foods and drinks in your diet and how often you eat them will decide how they impact your health. If sweetened drinks are less than 8 ounces per day, their impact may be small.

Fruit juices, soda, and other sweetened drinks are often sold in large amounts – 12, 20 or even 64 ounces. Eat and drink less added sugar by being aware of the ingredients.

Reading a Nutrition Facts Label

One teaspoon of sugar is equal to 4 grams of sugar. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends limiting the amount of added sugar you consume to:

- **Women** - 6 teaspoons (24 grams)
- **Men** - 9 teaspoons (36 grams)
- **Pre-teens and teens** - 8 teaspoons (32 grams)
- **Children** - 5 teaspoons (20 grams)

| Nutrition Facts | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 8 servings per container | |
| Serving size | 2/3 cup (55g) |
| Amount per serving | |
| Calories | 230 |
| % Daily Value* | |
| Total Fat 8g | 10% |
| Saturated Fat 1g | 5% |
| Trans Fat 0g | |
| Cholesterol 0mg | 0% |
| Sodium 160mg | 7% |
| Total Carbohydrate 37g | 13% |
| Dietary Fiber 4g | 14% |
| Total Sugars 12g | |
| Includes 10g Added Sugars | 20% |
| Protein 3g | |
| Vitamin D 2mcg | 10% |
| Calcium 260mg | 20% |
| Iron 8mg | 45% |
| Potassium 235mg | 6% |

*Look for Added Sugars on the food label to see how much added sugar is in one serving.

Better Sweet Options

Go for naturally sweet options. Enjoy the sweetness of fresh fruit or look for recipes made with fruit. Try freezing grapes or dipping blueberries in low-fat vanilla yogurt and freezing for a refreshing treat.

Enjoy a small piece of dark chocolate. The higher the amount of cocoa, the less the sugar content. Dark chocolate is also a source of antioxidants. It may help lower blood pressure and protect your heart. Eat 1 to 2 ounces per day.

When to Call

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please contact UW Health at the phone number listed below. You can also visit our website at <https://www.uwhealth.org/nutrition>.

Who to Call

Nutrition Clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics and American Family Children's Hospital
(608) 890-5500

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright 2/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#399