

A Deli Cut Balance

How luncheon meats stack up

by MADELEINE GREY

Eight-year-old David Bondy* loves to dig into deli meats. “It’s nothing for him to have six slices of bologna, salami or ham in one sitting,” reports his mom, Glenda. “When he’s looking for a snack, he goes straight to the fridge searching for luncheon meats. If I don’t buy bologna for a while, he’ll remind me to.”

The Toronto mom calls her son a “protein man,” but wonders if her son’s passion for processed meats is a good thing. “I guess I have some misgivings. I know nitrites are an issue.”

And that’s not all. According to Barrie, Ont., registered dietitian Jody Dawson, the occasional serving of luncheon meat is just fine. There are, however, three things parents should keep in mind when serving slices to kids: fat, nitrites and salt.

Fatty facts When it comes to luncheon meat, the rule is to look for leaner choices. What exactly qualifies as lean? Dawson defines it as five percent fat or less, and good choices include roasted turkey and chicken, ham, pastrami and roast beef. But is fat really a big deal for rapidly growing kids? Absolutely, says Dawson. A diet high in saturated fats is not good for their little hearts. High-fat options (five percent fat or more) to avoid include bologna, pepperoni, macaroni loaf, mock chicken, salami and kielbasa.

Nitrate knowledge Nitrites and nitrates are preservatives that have been traditionally added to cured meats to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria (such as the deadly *Clostridium botulinum* which causes botulism). They



The Dish on Portions	
calories	352
protein	27.6 g
fat	9.5 g
carbohydrates	48.1 g
niacin	56%*
iron	26%*
vitamin A	177%*
vitamin C	113%*

*of recommended daily amount

Roast Turkey and Veggies Wrap

Roll up some of these crunchy, flavour-packed wraps for school lunches, sports meets or even a light supper.

- 2 **tblsp** (30 mL) **low-fat mayonnaise**
- ½ **cup** (75 mL) **mild salsa**
- 4 **10 in./25 cm whole wheat tortillas**
- ½ **lb** (250 g) **roasted deli turkey slices**
- 8 **leaves leafy lettuce, middle rib removed**
- 2 **cups** (500 mL) **grated carrot**
- 1 **red bell pepper, julienned**
- pepper**

In a small bowl, whisk together mayonnaise and salsa. Take a tortilla and spread 4 tsp (20 mL) of salsa mixture evenly over the surface. Arrange 2 to 3 slices of turkey on tortilla. Cover with 2 lettuce leaves. On lower third of tortilla, arrange ½ cup (125 mL) of grated carrot in a thick horizontal line. Place a quarter of the julienned red pepper on top of the carrot. Season with pepper. Wrap up the tortilla, starting at the bottom, securing around the carrot and pepper to create a pretty visual when cut. Repeat 3 times.

Makes 4 wraps.

Our recipe tester, Jenny Koniuk, tests Nutrition using both imperial and metric measurements. However, proportions in the metric version may differ slightly from the original, causing small variations in the result.

also add flavour and colour to these meats. Health Canada regulates the amount meat processors are permitted to use, saying nitrites and nitrates are “safe and efficacious.”

Enter the controversy. According to Alexander Hall, an assistant professor at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine in Toronto, nitrates are transformed in the stomach into nitrosamines “which have been identified as carcinogenic substances for quite some time. Cancers of the esophagus, larynx, mouth, liver and stomach seem to be associated with nitrosamines.”

Hall says it’s smart to avoid nitrites and nitrates “especially for children, due to their smaller size.” Check labels and look for these words: potassium nitrite, sodium nitrite, potassium nitrate and sodium nitrate. Some health food stores and organic butchers sell nitrite- and nitrate-free deli meats, but check labels to be sure.

The good news is that vitamins C and E can inhibit the development of nitrosamines in the stomach, so Hall says whole-grain breads (there’s your vitamin E) and vegetables (high in C) are the best choices for a sandwich made with luncheon meat.

Salt city Part of the reason kids love to gobble up pepperoni and bologna is the lure of salt. Many luncheon meats supply 25 to 50 percent of a kid’s daily value in sodium. All food labels list daily value percentages on the right column and Dawson warns that 20 percent or more is “high.”

SLICE OF REALITY

The stats below are computed per 3½ oz (100 g) serving for the sake of comparison only. A serving of luncheon meats as defined by *Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating* is smaller, just 2 to 3 oz (60 to 90 g), which can be several thin slices.

Ham comes in many shapes and forms, but it’s always made from the hind leg

Store it right

The best-before date on a package of luncheon meats refers to the length of time it is safe to store the product in your fridge, unopened. Once opened, luncheon meats can be stored safely in the fridge for three to five days.

of a pig. Most ham is wet or brine cured. Prosciutto is dry cured in salt and usually does not contain nitrites (check labels).

Ham: 163 calories, 9 g fat, 1304 mg sodium

Extra-lean ham: 110 calories, 3 g fat, 1106 mg sodium

Roast beef and poultry are typically bland, and many kids are apt to snub them once they’ve tasted zestier, fattier items like pepperoni and salami. The trick is to get kids hooked on them first to keep them on the lean track.

Roast turkey: 99 calories, 2 g fat, 966 mg sodium

Roast chicken: 128 calories, 5.6 g fat, 1196 mg sodium

Roast beef: 110 calories, 3 g fat, 1560 mg sodium (some brands contain no nitrites)

Pastrami is made from beef brisket and is usually cured and smoked. Think New York Jewish deli and rye bread.

Pastrami: 146 calories, 6 g fat, 885 mg sodium

Corned beef is so called because in “the olden days” it was preserved with “corns” or grains of salt. It’s usually chopped, pressed and packed.

Corned beef: 251 calories, 19 g fat, 1134 mg sodium

Pepperoni is often a kid favourite despite all those spices and dreaded hot peppers. There can be as many as 15 slices of pizza pepperoni in a 30 g serving. A little can go a long way.

Pepperoni: 466 calories, 40 g fat, 1788 mg sodium

Bologna is reputed to be a cheap imitation of the original smooth-textured

sausage of Bologna, Italy, the mortadella. It can be made from a mixture of meats or just one. Turkey and chicken versions can be lower in fat.

Bologna: 272 calories, 23 g fat, 1120 mg sodium

Kielbasa and salami are for true garlic-sausage lovers. Consider adding an ounce or two to a healthy pot of beans, a vegetable soup or sautéed kale and onions.

Kielbasa: 226 calories, 17 g fat, 1200 mg sodium

Salami: 258 calories, 22 g fat, 1140 mg sodium

SOY SOLUTION?

Soy deli meats look like the real McCoy and are very high in protein, contain more iron than real deli meats, are low in fat (especially saturated) and, bonus, have no nitrites or nitrates. Besides, soy contains plant chemicals called isoflavones that may guard against a number of health problems. A 3½ oz (100 g) serving of Yves Veggie Bologna Slices has 130 calories, 3.5 g fat and 770 mg sodium.

Toronto mom and vegetarian cookbook author Nettie Cronish says her seven-year-old son, Emery, goes to school every day with a soy bologna sandwich. “Emery loves the stuff,” she says, “and he’s happy to snack on it straight, especially after he’s cut it into shapes with a cookie cutter.” Ironically, the healthiest luncheon meat is a fake one — and that’s not baloney. ❤️

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