

The Great Pretenders

What's really a healthy choice — and what isn't

by **MADELEINE GREY**

On a recent grocery shop with my kids, we enter into a friendly round of the Healthy or Not? game. They point at food and I either shake or nod my head. Seems simple enough, so we start: Apple! Nod. Chips! Shake. Broccoli! Nod. Carbs! Shake, nod, shake.

“You lose!” smirk my young contestants.

Ever feel as if there's no way to stay on top of nutrition? Are you stumbling through supermarket aisles wondering if you know the good guys from the bad? We've zeroed in on some great pretenders in the food department and uncovered the nutritional facts, so that you won't be caught shaking and nodding at the same time.

ILLUSION Avoid red meat.

Unless you're raising a vegetarian, extra lean or lean beef is A-OK for nutrition. It's an important source of 12 essential nutrients, including protein, iron, zinc and B vitamins. All that protein means beef really sticks to a kid's ribs, providing long-lasting satiety.

REALITY CHECK

- Beef is loaded with iron, a much-needed nutrient for growing kids of any age, but especially teen girls. Without iron, children get tired. It's necessary for healthy blood and energy levels, plus it impacts learning and growth.
- Remember: A serving is no bigger than a deck of cards. Look for lean ground beef and trim steaks and roasts of visible fat.
- To avoid E. coli, do not serve rare hamburgers. Since colour isn't necessarily the safest indicator of doneness, the best policy is to pull out an instant read thermometer and check for an internal temperature of 160°F (71°C).

ILLUSION Pick packaged fruit snacks.

Nay. While junior shoppers may clamour for these chewy, gooey treats, fruit snacks aren't much different than

gummi bears or jujubes. In other words, they're really just candy disguised as fruit.

REALITY CHECK

- Betty Crocker Fruit by the Foot says “made with real fruit” on the package, but sugar is first on the ingredients list. One 21 g roll contains 80 calories, no fibre, 10 g of sugars and 1 g of fat, thanks to hydrogenated cottonseed oil. Where's the fruit? It's third on the ingredients list as concentrated grape and pear purée.
- The packaging for Sunkist Fruit First Fruit Snack claims it “contains over 30% real fruit.” The first ingredient is reconstituted orange purée, but it's followed by sugar, then glucose (a.k.a. sugar) solids. One 22 g pouch supplies 80 calories, 0 g fat, 1 g fibre and 13 g (over 3 tsp) sugar.
- Bumping up the sugar content in all these products is fructose, a natural sugar found in processed fruit purées. According to public health nutritionist Ellen Desjardins of Waterloo, Ont., “It's best to get fructose packaged the natural way (in real fruit) because that way, you get more than just sugar — fibre, vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals too.”



The Dish on Portions
 calories 105
 fat 10.8 g
 carbohydrates 2.6 g

Balsamic & Honey Dressing

This easy dressing is full of “good fats,” fun to make and cheaper than supermarket brands. (Bonus: There's no preservatives, additives or unpronounceable ingredients.) All you need is an empty jar and a volunteer shaker at your side.

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| 1 | clove garlic, minced or pressed |
| ¼ tsp (1 mL) | salt |
| ½ cup (125 mL) | extra-virgin olive oil |
| 2 tbsp (30 mL) | balsamic vinegar |
| 1 tbsp (15 mL) | honey |
| 1 tsp (5 mL) | Dijon mustard |
| | freshly ground black pepper |

Put minced or pressed garlic on a cutting board, sprinkle with salt and mash with a fork. Transfer to an empty jam jar. Add oil, vinegar, honey, mustard and ground pepper. Secure lid on the jar. Shake vigorously. Makes 10 servings (1 tbsp each).

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

PHOTO: SUSAN ASHUKIAN PROPS STYLING: GENEVIEVE WISEMAN/JUDY INC. FOOD STYLING: NICOLE YOUNG

ILLUSION Avoid that fatty avocado.

Sure it's high in fat, but it's the good-for-you kind that kids need more of. This creamy fruit (that everyone considers a veggie) is loaded with monounsaturated fat that helps protect a tyke's heart.

REALITY CHECK

- Not all avocados are created equal. Those that come from California are generally smaller and darker green than those from Florida. Just one half of a California avocado contains 15 g of fat (with 10 g monounsaturated). Florida avocados have a smooth, light green skin and, ounce for ounce, a little less fat than their Californian cousins.
- Avocados are high in folate, potassium and vitamin E. Slice one in half, pop out the pit and give your snacker a spoon. It's that easy.
- Avocados make a healthier sandwich spread than mayo or butter. Try tossing a ripe, soft avocado in the blender with milk, ice cubes and a little sugar to create the greenest, creamiest milkshake your family might ever dare drink.



ILLUSION Popcorn is a healthy snack.

They call it Smartfood, but don't fall for it. One serving (3 cups) of Smartfood popcorn contains 19 g fat, 520 mg sodium and a redeeming 4 g of fibre.

REALITY CHECK

- Reduced-fat Smartfood contains 6 g of fat (but that includes trans fats).
- President's Choice The Smart Snack doesn't fare much better, delivering

13 g of fat in a 2 cup serving.

- Hats off to the guy in glasses! Orville Redenbacher's Smart Pop! with only 2.5 g fat per serving (a whopping 8½ cups) with 7 g of fibre. Orville has removed all the trans fats from this microwave popcorn.
- Careful with these kernels! Popcorn is a choking hazard for children under age three.

ILLUSION Shy away from carbs.

Au contraire. Kids rely on carbohydrates for energy, whether it comes in the form of sugars or starches. The trick is to source out the good from the bad.

REALITY CHECK

- Good sources of natural sugars are found in whole fruits, veggies and milk.
- Put a lid on simple sugars found in pop, juice drinks or cocktails, candy, donuts, cakes and cookies.
- In the starch department, choose whole grains over refined. Say bye to whites (pasta, bread, cakes) and hello to oatmeal, whole wheat breads, sweet potatoes and brown rice.

ILLUSION Pour on the granola.

Before your little one fills his bowl with granola, crunch these numbers.

REALITY CHECK

- Because granola contains oatmeal plus nuts and oil, *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* recommends a ½ cup serving (that barely covers the bottom of most bowls).
- Granola is denser and higher in fat than other cereal choices. President's Choice Blue Menu Original Granola contains only 1.5 g fat in a ½ cup serving, while Quaker Harvest Crunch "Original" contains 4.5 g fat (77 percent saturated fat), No Name Raisin & Almond contains 6 g (25 percent saturated fat) and PC Organics Honey Almond Granola contains 5.5 g (less than 23 percent saturated fat).

ILLUSION Choose bran muffins at coffee shops.

Feeling virtuous ordering a bran muffin in the face of all those other treats?

You figure all that fibre might come in a tidy low-cal, low-fat parcel?

REALITY CHECK

- One honey bran muffin sold at Starbucks (Ontario only) contains 421 calories, 12.9 g fat, 776 mg sodium and 35 g sugars (that's over 8 tsp).
- Your little one will be chomping on similar fat and calorie stats at Tim Hortons where the raisin bran muffin contains 390 calories and 12 g fat. Yes, there's fibre (Starbucks 5.6 g and Tim's 5 g), but it comes with a lot of refined sugar and fat.

ILLUSION Pick non-fat dressings.

Not necessary since kids need fat — especially if it makes salad greens and veggies more palatable. Fat is a major source of energy and aids in the absorption of essential vitamins. According to recommendations for healthy eating from the National Academies' Institute of Medicine, children's fat intake is similar to adults (20 to 35 percent of total caloric intake). Infants and younger children need more: 25 to 40 percent.

REALITY CHECK

- Montreal dietitian Louise Lambert-Lagacé, co-author of *Good Fat Bad Fat*, picks extra-virgin olive oil as her top cooking oil since it is unrefined (or cold-pressed), tolerates high temperatures and is high in monounsaturated fats.
- High cooking temperatures can destroy the beneficial antioxidants found in unrefined oils.
- Cold-pressed, unrefined hazelnut and walnut oil are also good, healthy picks for salad dressings — but expensive. "Use part olive oil, part nut oil for super taste," Lambert-Lagacé suggests. Who knew something that tastes so yummy can be poured right on? ❤️

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