

Inquisitive Eaters

Answers to your top nutrition questions

by **MADELEINE GREY**

A long list of food and nutrition questions comes my way every month at Today'sparent.com. Topics run the gamut from the safety of eating raw potatoes (go ahead!) to choosing a healthy frozen fish stick (High Liner Healthy Bake Breaded Fish Fingers). Here are some of the year's top queries:

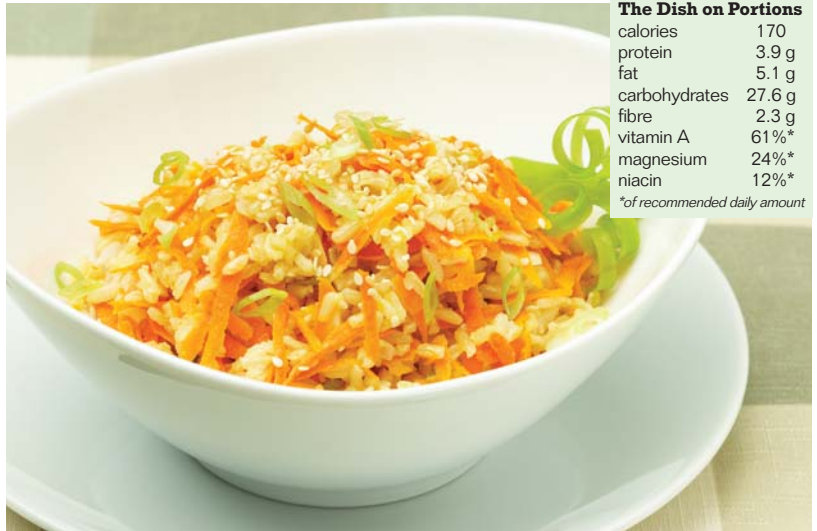
“What's best, butter or margarine?”

It's a decades-old conundrum that has popped up many times at my Today'sparent.com forum. For those who like clear-cut answers, the sad truth is there isn't one. According to London, Ont., dietitian Denise Beatty, both butter and margarine have a place in a child's diet. She recommends quality, heart-healthy non-hydrogenated margarines (like Becel, President's Choice Celeb, Lactantia Healthy Attitude and Nuvel).

But is this really a concern for kids? Beatty notes that one-third of Canadian children are overweight (and of these, about half could be considered obese) with increased risk of high cholesterol, making them contenders for margarine consumption. Butter is high in saturated fat, but for the average child, there's nothing wrong with that, says Beatty. “Both butter and non-hydrogenated margarine can be good choices,” she says. “Just use them sparingly.”

“Are trans fats as bad as they say?”

Yes! Most shoppers know how to ferret out the trans fats from the grocery cart (by looking for “no trans fats” on cracker, cookie and snack food packages, and checking ingredients lists for the trans fat code words “hydrogenated” and “shortening”),



The Dish on Portions

calories	170
protein	3.9 g
fat	5.1 g
carbohydrates	27.6 g
fibre	2.3 g
vitamin A	61%*
magnesium	24%*
niacin	12%*

*of recommended daily amount

Bugs Bunny Brown Rice

Brown rice has a nuttier, crunchier texture compared to its refined white cousin. This colourful side dish is a carb and veggie in one. Cold leftovers make for a tasty Oriental salad the next day.

- 1 cup (250 mL) brown rice**
- 2¼ cups (550 mL) water**
- 1 cube or pouch of low-sodium chicken bouillon**
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) toasted sesame oil**
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) water**
- 2 tsp (10 mL) soy sauce**
- ½ tsp (2 mL) sugar**
- 2 carrots, peeled and grated (1 cup grated)**
- 2 green onions, minced (optional)**
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) sesame seeds**

Bring brown rice, water and bouillon in a medium saucepan to a rapid boil. Stir, reduce to simmer and cook, uncovered, for 3 minutes. Cover and cook at low for 40 minutes. Whisk together sesame oil, water, soy sauce and sugar in a small bowl. Once rice is cooked, add grated carrot, green onions and soy dressing to cooked rice. Combine, cover with lid and set aside a minute or two to heat carrots. Garnish with sesame seeds.

Serves 4 to 6.

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.

but navigation is tricky in the fast-food department. Deep-fried items like french fries, chicken fingers and doughnuts are loaded with hydrogenated oils, with a few exceptions like (Canadian owned) New York Fries who sell not only trans-fat-free fries, but have also cleaned up their gravy and cheese sauce.

“Is Minigo yogurt?”



Despite a distinct resemblance in both packaging and flavour, Yoplait Minigo is not yogurt, but a blend of fresh cheese and fruit purée.

According to Toronto dietitian Daina Kalnins, co-author of *Better Food for Kids*, Minigo has similar nutrients, but is higher in fat, sugar and calories than most yogurts. The extra sugar and fat don't concern Kalnins, who says one or two Minigo a day is fine for kids.

Yogurt is also a good nutritional choice, but not all yogurts are created equal. Kalnins says the added sugar in yogurt tubes or flavoured and fruit-bottom yogurts is OK for little bodies. But when it comes to the artificial sweeteners found in low-fat and non-fat yogurts, Kalnins takes exception. Be it aspartame or sucralose, Kalnins is not “comfortable with artificial sweeteners for growing children.”

“Do canned and frozen vegetables have the same nutrition as fresh?”

If your little tyke consumes more frozen and canned produce than fresh, no worries. Not only are they economical and convenient, in some cases, frozen and canned fruits or vegetables can be *more* nutritious than fresh. Take tomatoes: When these red orbs are canned or jarred, heat breaks down their cell structures, increasing the absorption level of important cancer-fighting phytochemicals like beta carotene and lycopene. Meanwhile, the immediacy of freezing brings a

whole new meaning to “freshness.” Produce bound for freezing is picked at optimum freshness and quickly frozen (usually on the day it's picked) at very low temperatures. Chances are the broccoli sitting in your crisper has been out of the soil for much longer than that! On the downside, canned fruit and vegetables lose heat-sensitive and water-soluble nutrients through processing. If you use the canning liquid, you'll get some of those nutrients back. Look for low-sodium and sugar-free when you're shopping for canned.

“Is couscous a whole grain?”

Surprise, surprise, couscous is not a grain, but a type of pasta. Those little kid-friendly, quick-to-make granules are made from durum wheat, which is pounded into semolina flour — the same material used to make spaghetti, penne and rigatoni. Just like pasta, couscous is available in both regular (read: refined) and whole wheat versions. Whole grains are rich sources of fibre, vitamins, minerals and other important nutrients, making them a healthier option than their refined counterparts. The Whole Grains Council, based in Boston, lists the following foods and flours as whole grains: amaranth, barley (lightly pearled), brown and coloured rice (see the kid-tempting recipe on the previous page), buckwheat, bulgur, corn and whole cornmeal, kamut, millet, oatmeal and whole oats, popcorn, quinoa, spelt, triticale, whole rye, whole or cracked wheat, wheat berries and wild rice.

“How much juice should my child drink?”

Juice hounds beware! It turns out that a constant sippy-on-the-go full of fruit juice is not a healthy habit. While fruit juice does contain wholesome vitamins and minerals, it's best drunk in moderation. The Canadian Paediatric



Society recommends no more than 4 to 8 oz (125 to 250 mL) a day, depending on a child's size and weight. Kalnins puts

a lid on juice with even stricter guidelines: ideally, no juice at all until a child is four or five. “Develop a water habit,” she suggests. Or, perhaps more realistically, dilute your little one's apple juice.

“Should I store fresh carrots in the crisper?”

Yes, but did you know they'll last a lot longer if you chop off the tops, first? Carrots (plus beets, radishes, turnips and parsnips) are root vegetables that once removed from the soil still operate as if they haven't been. In other words, the leaves draw nutrients and moisture from the roots, a botanical scenario that does not improve freshness or flavour. All types of carrots (fresh with greens, fat topless ones in plastic bags, or baby carrots) store best in the fridge. An afternoon left out on the counter and a carrot's freshness diminishes considerably. But sweet potatoes, cooking onions and whole squash all store best in a dark, cool cupboard.

Then there are fruits that masquerade as veggies, such as tomatoes, avocados and plantain. All of these taste better left at room temperature in the fruit bowl. Bunches of greens — spinach, lettuce, arugula, Swiss chard, watercress, even green onions — stay crispy-fresh longer if you remove the rubber bands or twist-ties, then wrap them in paper towels and store in the fridge. ♥

Today's Parent **com**

Did you know that Madeleine Grey hosts a live forum to answer your food and nutrition questions on the first Tuesday of every month? Join her this month on December 6: Todaysparent.com/forums.