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"Eat Healthy, Live Happy"

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Featured Recipe * Healthy Nutella

2 cups raw hazelnuts 1 ½ Tbsp. pure vanilla extract
¼ cup cocoa powder 1 Tbsp. additional sugar
¼ tsp. + 1/8 tsp. salt ½ cup milk of choice
¼ cup + 2 Tbsp. pure maple syrup or unrefined sugar

Optional: 2 tsp. oil for extra smoothness

Directions: Roast hazelnuts for 6–8 minutes at 400 F (or use roasted hazelnuts), and rub them together on a paper towel to get the skins off. (It's okay if a few stubborn skins won't come off.) In a Vita-mix or food processor, blend the nuts until they've turned to butter, then add all of the other ingredients and blend a long time until it's smooth like Nutella.

Don't be Tricked... Treats are wonderful and can make a tasty addition to any diet in moderation, of course, especially during celebrations and holidays. But they are just that, a special treat. In recent television commercials, Nutella spread on toast has been advertised as a healthy breakfast for kids with its "healthy, wholesome ingredients, like hazelnuts, skim milk, and a hint of delicious cocoa." I think that they forgot to mention the primary ingredients, sugar and palm oil. In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires a two-tablespoon serving size for Nutella and classifies it as a dessert topping. In the United Kingdom, the serving size is one heaping teaspoon (or 17–20% of the US serving). Per two-tablespoon serving, Nutella has 21 grams, or 5 teaspoons worth of sugar. To put that into perspective, according to the American Heart Association (AHA) added sugar intake should be limited to 6 teaspoons per day for women and 9 teaspoons for men. Starting out the day with Nutella puts a person almost there. The multigrain toast mentioned in the advertisement is the only healthy part of that breakfast, but should parents be using sugar and fat to get their kids to eat whole grains? Hazelnuts, like any other nut offer health benefits and contain monounsaturated fat, protein, and fiber, but Nutella has more sugar and oil than nuts and is very low in protein. It definitely should not replace nut butters, like peanut or almond butter, with their low sugar and higher protein content. If you are looking for that chocolatey flavor, you'd be better off making your own. Try the above recipe from ChocolateCoveredKatie.com, which has only 5 grams of sugar per 2 tablespoons (instead of the 21 grams in Nutella).

Vinegar: Health or Hype?

Apple cider vinegar has been associated with all sorts of health benefits. It has been touted as a natural miracle elixir, aiding in weight loss while also improving blood sugar levels and curing a sore throat. Apple cider vinegar is made by adding yeast to apple juice, which turns the fruit sugar into alcohol (fermentation). Bacteria then convert the alcohol into acetic acid, making the vinegar taste sour. During the fermentation process, cloudy particles form and cluster. This cluster includes beneficial compounds, like enzymes and pre- and probiotics (good intestinal bacteria) and is referred to as the "mother", which is removed during pasteurization. All types of vinegars are used in cooking, salad dressings, and as a preservative. Since they contain high amounts of acid, they should not be consumed straight. Instead one or two tablespoons should be added to water or tea. With all of the health claims, what does the science reveal?

Diabetes: Recent scientific studies have revealed that all types of vinegar, not just apple cider, can help to lower blood sugar levels after meals in people with type 2 diabetes and prediabetes.

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The acetic acid in vinegar interacts with starch digesting enzymes in the body to keep post meal blood sugar levels down. Studies have also shown that when vinegar was ingested before a meal, blood flow to muscles and glucose (sugar) uptake by muscles improved and insulin and triglyceride levels were reduced for up to five hours after the meal. If you are currently taking diabetes medications, vinegar could intensify the effects so consult with your doctor about dosage adjustments.

Weight Loss: Studies show a very small amount of weight loss, 1/3 of a pound per week or less, in people given either 15 ml. (1 tablespoon) or 30 ml. (2 tablespoons) of vinegar daily. Although vinegar alone is not going to make a big difference, it could be a beneficial addition to a weight loss plan that includes a healthy diet and portion control.

Cough and Sore Throat: The father of medicine, Hippocrates mixed vinegar with honey to treat chronic coughs and sore throats. Acetic acid, the main active ingredient in vinegar, helps fight bacteria, and it is these antibacterial properties that are believed to help provide relief from colds and sore throats, but this has not been studied in humans. Not only that but the vinegar itself can also burn your esophagus and harm tooth enamel. Experts caution its use for anyone predisposed to ulcers and reflux since it could exacerbate them.

Digestive Problems: This is where apple cider vinegar may win out over other vinegars. In the opening paragraph, I mention the "mother" found in unfiltered apple cider vinegars, like Bragg's. Since the "mother" contains pre- and probiotics as well as enzymes, it may aid in digestion.

Detoxification: Your kidneys, liver, and intestines eliminate toxins and waste while absorbing beneficial nutrients. Apple cider vinegar does not detoxify your body.

Cardiovascular Disease: Do you own a rodent? If you do, high doses of vinegar have been shown to improve blood lipids (cholesterol and triglycerides), reduce oxidative stress, and reduce blood pressure in rats. Unfortunately, human research is very limited and study results are inconsistent. More research is needed.

Cancer: There have been minimal cell culture and animal experiments showing anti-cancer properties of vinegar. Human observational studies have resulted in both increases and decreases in cancer incidence. Much more research is needed.

Take caution when adding apple cider vinegar to your diet. Large amounts might decrease potassium levels in the body. Muscles, including your heart, and nerves need potassium to function properly. Apple cider vinegar may affect diabetes and heart disease medications as well as diuretics and laxatives. Is it a magical potion for all that ails you? No, but it is virtually calorie free and can enhance the flavor of foods. Whether they are added to salad dressings or marinades, all vinegars, not just apple cider, provide some health benefits as well as a great variety of flavors.

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Party appetizers often make it tough to stay on the healthy track. Bite size does not mean low calorie. You won't believe the impact that just a few nibbles can have.

Mini Pigs in a blanket:

The average person will eat about 3 of these bite size appetizers. Since each one has 70 calories, 5 grams of fat, and 128 mg. of sodium, this puts us at 210 calories, 15 grams of fat, and 384 mg. of sodium so far.



Mixed Nuts :

Nuts are healthy but high in calories. A mere quarter cup has about 170-230 calories, 14-19 grams of fat, and up to 150 mg. of sodium. Take a few and then move away from the bowl.

Spinach Dip :

Traditional spinach dip has 166 calories, 16 grams of total fat, and 290.5 grams of sodium per ¼ cup. Of course, it is typically served with chips, which add about 100 calories, 5 grams of fat, and 82 mg. of sodium per 5 chips making this a 266 calorie snack with a total of 21 grams of fat and 372.5 mg. of sodium if you stick to 5 chips.



Party Appetizers

Swedish Meatballs:

The President's Choice version has 260 calories, 20 grams of fat, and 540 mg. of sodium per 6 meatballs. At least they are healthier than the pig's in a blanket.

Cheese and Crackers:

Two ounces of cheese, like cheddar, brie, or blue cheese, has approximately 220 calories, 18 grams of fat, and 360 mg. of sodium, and that is not even the triple cream. Six triscuits adds 120 calories, 3.5 grams of fat, and 160 mg. of sodium bringing the total for this appetizer to 340 calories, 21.5 grams of fat, and 520 mg. of sodium. That is if you only have two ounces of cheese, which is the size of about 8 stacked dice.

All of this, plus drinks and dessert, and you have consumed about 3,000 calories. Fat, salt, and sugar are not the only way to entice the taste buds. These party pleasing hors d' oeuvres are an indulgence without the extra calories.

Shrimp Cocktail:

Loaded with protein and low in calories, this is the perfect appetizer to indulge in. Each medium shrimp provides 7 calories and a teaspoon of cocktail sauce adds about 5 calories so you can eat 10 of these for 120 calories.

Yogurt Based Spinach Dip:

The recipe below has 81 calories, 5 grams of total fat, 1 gram of saturated fat, and 290.5 grams of sodium per serving (¼ cup). To reduce the sodium in this recipe, try replacing the dry vegetable soup mix with a combination of garlic powder, onion powder, crushed dry parsley, dill weed, black pepper, and a small amount of salt to taste. Serve with vegetables for dipping, which add minimal calories but are loaded with vitamins and minerals.

Ingredients /Serves 16

10 ounces Frozen Spinach

16 ounces Plain Nonfat Yogurt

1 cup Light Mayonnaise

1 Package Dry Vegetable Soup Mix (Suggested: Knorr)

Thaw spinach and squeeze out water. Place spinach in a large bowl and stir in yogurt, mayonnaise, and dry soup mix. Cover with plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator for approximately 2 hours.

Toothpick Caprese:

Ten of these mini salads come in at about 100 calories.

2 Pints Grape Tomatoes

1 Bunch Basil Leaves, large leaves can be torn in half

1 (8 oz.) Container Mini Mozzarella Balls (Suggested: Belgioioso Pearls)

Balsamic Vinegar Spray (Suggested: Roland Balsamic Spritzer)

Toothpicks

Slide one grape tomato, folded basil leaf, and mozzarella ball onto a toothpick, and spray with balsamic vinegar. Place on a serving dish, and continue with the remaining grape tomatoes.

Olives:

Although the sodium content is a little high, olives are a low calorie snack option. Either black or green, 8 - 10 olives have only 45 calories.

Deviled Eggs with a healthy twist

Using either avocado or low fat mayonnaise reduces the calories and improves the nutrition of traditional deviled eggs. These high protein snacks are very filling and tasty with only 34 - 50 calories each.



Party Appetizers

Happy  Holidays!

Guacamole Stuffed Eggs

12 Large Eggs, Hard Boiled, Peeled, and Cut in Half Lengthwise
2 ripe Avocados
1-2 Tbsp. Fresh Squeezed Lime Juice (to taste)
2 Tbsp. Red Onion, diced
¼ tsp. Salt
1 clove Garlic, minced
½ Jalapeno Pepper, minced with seeds for added heat (optional)
2 Tbsp. Fresh Cilantro, minced
Chili Powder to garnish

Remove yolks from egg halves, put 12 yolk halves in a bowl, and discard the rest or reserve them for another recipe. Add avocado, lime juice, red onion, salt, garlic, jalapeno pepper, and cilantro to the bowl, and stir gently until it reaches the desired consistency. Stuff egg white halves with avocado mixture. Sprinkle each with chili powder if desired. Serve immediately or refrigerate until served.

In the following EatingWell Deviled Eggs, some of the filling is replaced with nonfat cottage cheese.
(source: www.eatingwell.com, EatingWell May/June 2009)

Active Time: 20 minutes

Total Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients/ Serves 24

12 Large hard-boiled eggs (see Tip), peeled
1/3 cup nonfat cottage cheese
1/4 cup low-fat mayonnaise
3 Tbsp. minced fresh chives or scallion greens
1 Tbsp. sweet pickle relish
2 tsp. yellow mustard
1/8 tsp. salt
Paprika for garnish

Halve eggs lengthwise with a sharp knife. Gently remove the yolks. Place 16 yolk halves in a food processor (discard the remaining 8 yolk halves). Add cottage cheese, mayonnaise, chives (or scallion greens), relish, mustard and salt; process until smooth. Spoon about 2 teaspoons yolk mixture into each egg white half. Sprinkle with paprika, if desired.

Make Ahead Tip : Cover and refrigerate for up to 1 day.

Tip: To hard-boil eggs:

Place eggs in a single layer in a saucepan; cover with water. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low and cook at the barest simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from heat, pour out hot water and cover the eggs with ice-cold water. Let stand until cool enough to handle before peeling.

Social gatherings are often centered on food, but true holiday spirit is about celebrating together, establishing lasting traditions, and giving to others. Use parties as a time to catch up with friends and family. Party food doesn't have to be high in calories, especially when shared with friends and family filled with holiday cheer. Enjoy comforting, healthy food and fun this holiday season.

