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Layered Hummus Dip

Courtesy of Taste of Home



**Serves
About 12
Prep/Total
Time:
15 min.**

Ingredients:

- 1 carton (10 oz) hummus
- 1/4 cup finely chopped red onion
- 1/2 cup Greek olives, chopped
- 2 medium tomatoes, seeded and chopped
- 1 large English cucumber, chopped
- 1 cup crumbled feta cheese
- Baked pita chips

Directions:

Spread hummus into a shallow 10-in. round dish. Layer with onion, olives, tomatoes, cucumber and cheese. Refrigerate until serving. Serve with chips & Enjoy!

A Win for Fast Food?... Sort of!

Fast food restaurants have long been criticized for their contribution to the obesity epidemic. I mean, according to a survey compiled by the National Center for Health Statistics, 36% of adults eat fast food daily, and the excessive calorie counts are now posted on the menu. But, have you ever thought about the meals at your favorite local or chain restaurant? Recent research published in the journal BMJ did just that, and you will be surprised to find out that many of the meals at chains and local restaurants worldwide are worse for you than fast food. Public Health England, the UK's health agency, recommends no more than 600 calories per meal although some experts argue for an 800-calorie maximum. Unfortunately, meals average 1,362 calories in full service restaurants in the United States as opposed to 969 calories in U.S. fast food establishments. Although both dramatically exceed the daily recommendation, fast food restaurants average 33% fewer calories than full service eateries. 94% of the meals at sit down restaurants exceed the recommended limit. Say what? CNN reported that the Bistro Shrimp Pasta at the Cheesecake Factory is equivalent to 5 1/2 Big Macs with 3,120 calories (1 1/2 days-worth), 89 grams of saturated fat, and 1,090 mg. of sodium. With their Breakfast Burrito and Chicken Parmesan "Pizza Style", the Cheesecake Factory also snagged 2 out of 8 of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) Xtreme Eating Awards in 2018, which is a list of restaurant meals with a day's worth of calories and a day's worth saturated fat, sodium, and/or added sugar. This is not a good list to be on to say the least. CSPI equated the Cheesecake Factory Breakfast Burrito to eating seven McDonalds Sausage McMuffins. Chili's Restaurant made the list as well with its Honey Chipotle Crispers and Waffles (2,510 calories, 40 grams of saturated fat, 4,480 mg of sodium, and 105 grams of added sugar), which CSPI equated to eating 5 Krispy Kreme glazed doughnuts smothered in 30 McDonalds Chicken McNuggets and 5 packets of barbecue sauce. To put all of this in perspective, the recommended daily intake is 2,000 calories, less than 20 grams of saturated fat, 2,300 mg of sodium or less, and 50 grams of added sugar or less. Needless to say, cooking at home is the best option, but the food industry should take some responsibility for making healthy eating easier when dining out. Until then, if the calories are not listed, the key is menu wording. The following words on the menu indicate higher calorie items.

Creamy or Cream Sauce	Battered or Breaded
Crispy, Fried, or Tempura	Con Queso
Au Gratin	Stuffed

Knowing what to look for makes choosing a healthier option easier. Always ask what sides are served with your dish, and try to replace things like fries with vegetables, like salad. You are more likely to eat something if it is sitting on the plate in front of you. Adjust your order and customize your sides. Hopefully more restaurants will soon offer half portions, which would bring meals closer to the daily recommendations.

Holiday Detox

Did all of the holiday festivities leave you feeling a little bloated with a bulging belly? Are you looking to kick start a healthy lifestyle? It might be time for a diet detox. Traditional detoxes, like juice fasts, herbal laxatives, and colon cleanses, can leave you feeling hungry and moody with muscle aches, lack of energy, low blood sugar levels, vitamin deficiencies, and dizziness. Not only that but colonics can cause infection, electrolyte imbalances, dehydration, nausea, and bowel perforation, and herbal laxatives can lead to dehydration and subsequent abnormal bowel function. That sounds painful and dangerous. After all that, they don't even get rid of toxins from your system faster or more effectively like most advertise. Your liver and kidneys do a great job of flushing your system already. In fact, natural microbes (healthy bacteria referred to as probiotics) live in our intestines, and disrupting them can cause bad bacteria to invade and lead to inflammation and disease.

Instead, think fiber. Fiber is a natural way to detox every day. I am referring to dietary fiber, not the stuff in bottle or pill form or added to foods, but what mother-nature provides. Fiber has gotten a lot of press for its many health benefits, which include cholesterol reduction, blood sugar control, bowel regularity, weight control, and colon cancer prevention. With all of the attention that fiber is getting, consumers are searching for it on labels. For this reason, food processors have found ways to add it to everything from jellybeans to yogurt.

The Institute of Medicine at the National Academy of Sciences classifies fiber into two categories. Dietary fiber, which is found in fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds, and whole grains, "consists of nondigestible carbohydrates that are intrinsic and intact in plants." Added fiber, or fiber that is added during processing, "consists of isolated nondigestible carbohydrates." The reason for this distinction is that polyfructoses (inulin and oligofructans), polydextrose, and maltodextrin, which are types of carbohydrate that provide soluble fiber are making their way into many foods. A lot of these foods are basically unhealthy, but the added fiber makes them appear to be healthy. Since these fibers have a bland or mildly sweet taste, they are being used to replace sugar, flour, and fat. Some people experience no side effects from these added fibers whereas others have multiple symptoms including flatulence, gas, bloating, nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhea, and constipation. The fact is that added fibers act differently in your intestine than dietary fibers.

There are two types of dietary fibers, insoluble and soluble. The insoluble type cleans the intestines, keeps food moving, and prevents constipation. Soluble fiber combines with water to form a gel that helps slow sugar absorption and remove cholesterol. The commonly used added fiber inulin, on the other hand, moves through the intestines to the colon where it is fermented by friendly bacteria, or probiotics. This fermentation produces gas. Even if you don't suffer any symptoms, added fiber does not provide the same health benefits as dietary fiber. Since it is being added to so many foods, the question, "How much is too much?" should be addressed.

You are probably wondering how to find added fiber in foods. Read the ingredient list. The front of the package can be deceiving with phrases like, "multi-grain," "contains whole grains," and "good source of fiber." Look for the word "whole," instead of "unbleached, enriched wheat/white flour" in the first few ingredients, and avoid items with sugar at the top of the list. Added fiber appears in the ingredient list as chicory root extract, chicory root powder, inulin, oligosaccharides, and fructans. Just because a product has fiber doesn't mean that it is good for you. Instead of fiber enriched products, fill your diet with natural sources of fiber, like fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds, and whole grains.

Adequate fluid intake is essential for your health. Drinking water helps rehydrate and cleanse. Drinking when thirsty, with meals, and when exercising is the best way to meet fluid needs. Although most fluids come from drinking, some also come from foods, like soups and vegetables and fruits with high water content (cucumbers, lettuce, tomato, celery, watermelon, strawberries, and more). Fluids in the body help transport waste out of cells. The kidneys remove waste products from the body in the urine. Adequate fluid intake allows the kidneys to cleanse and remove toxins completely, which creates light colored and odor free urine. Adequate hydration also helps keep things moving through your intestines and prevents constipation. Heard that earlier about fiber? Yes, both water and fiber combine to cleanse your intestines. Talk about a daily detox!

The articles in this newsletter are provided by Kristin Niessink MS, RD, LDN
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