

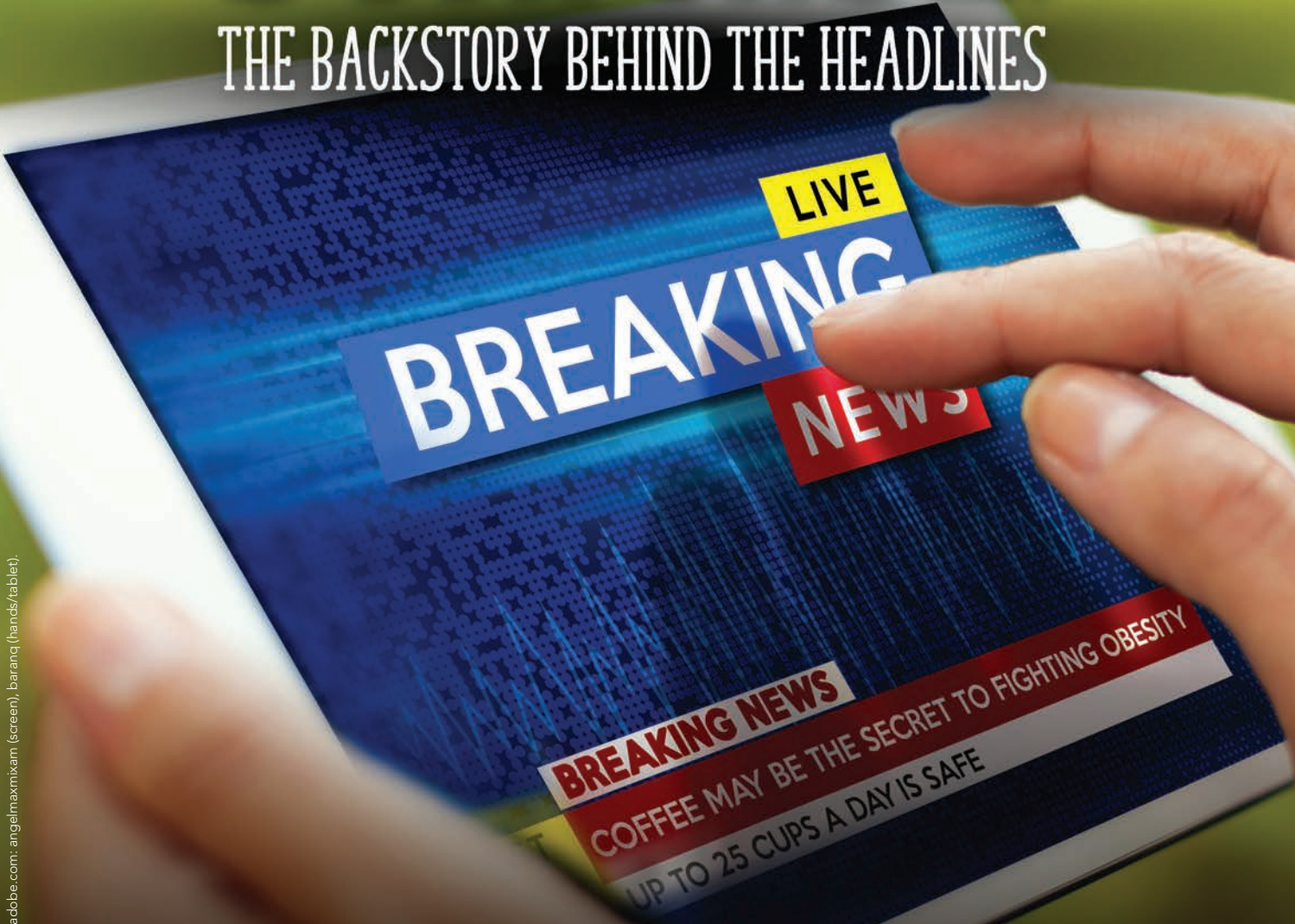
Nutrition Action

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HEALTH LETTER®
CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

SURPRISE!

THE BACKSTORY BEHIND THE HEADLINES



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**HOLLYWOOD
health advice?**

**MISLEADING
LABELS
The latest crop**

**Breakfast
ON THE RUN**

M E M O

DECODING FOOD LABELS



This month's *Nutrition Action*, like many, alerts readers to the latest crop of misleading claims on food labels. (See "Healthy or Hype?" p. 10.)

There seems to be an endless supply. And many of the claims are written in code words that let companies make foods sound healthier than they are.

Here's a cheat sheet:

■ **Flavored.** "Flavor" or "naturally flavored" next to, say, the word "apple" is often code for "contains little or no apple." It means you're getting apple flavor *instead* of apple.

■ **Made with.** "Made with real fruit" or "made with whole grain" is usually code for "made with *some*" or, too often, "made with very little" real fruit or whole grains.

■ **Support, enhance, maintain.** Claims like "supports brain health" or "maintains immunity" are code for "we're betting that the Food and Drug Administration won't ask us to cough up much evidence for this claim." They're called structure-function claims (as opposed to disease claims like "treats Alzheimer's," which do need evidence).

■ **Antioxidants.** That's usually code for "this food has added vitamins C and E to make it *sound* healthy." Most studies that have given people high doses of those vitamins—for example, to reduce the risk of cancer or heart disease—have come up empty.

■ **No nitrates or nitrites added.** The small print says something like "except those naturally occurring in celery powder and sea salt." That's code for "you're still getting plenty of nitrates and nitrites from the celery powder."

And those additives may help explain why processed meats (like bacon, ham, hot dogs, and sausage) raise the risk of colorectal cancer.

At the Center for Science in the Public Interest, *Nutrition Action's* publisher, we're working not just to expose these and other misleading claims but to get rid of them.

For example, in 2016 our lawyers sued Kellogg on behalf of consumers for splashing a "made with whole grain" claim on the front of some of its Cheez-It boxes. The crackers were mostly white flour.

Kellogg argued that its labels weren't misleading because they disclosed the number of grams of whole grain, and white flour came before whole wheat in the ingredients list. (Ingredients are listed in descending order.)

In December, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit agreed with us. It ruled that the disclosures in fine print don't "adequately dispel the inference communicated by the front of the package" and that a "reasonable consumer would be misled" by the labels.

We've also pressed the government to explicitly prohibit deceptive claims like these.

For example, we've urged the FDA to require any label that makes a "whole grain" claim to also disclose how much is whole: 50 percent? 5 percent? Labels should say. Similarly, if a label makes a "made with real fruit" claim, it should disclose how much fruit is in the food.

It's hard enough for consumers to eat a healthy diet. They shouldn't need to carry a secret decoder ring while grocery shopping.

Peter G. Lurie, MD, MPH, President
Center for Science in the Public Interest



"Made with whole grain" is often code for "mostly white flour."

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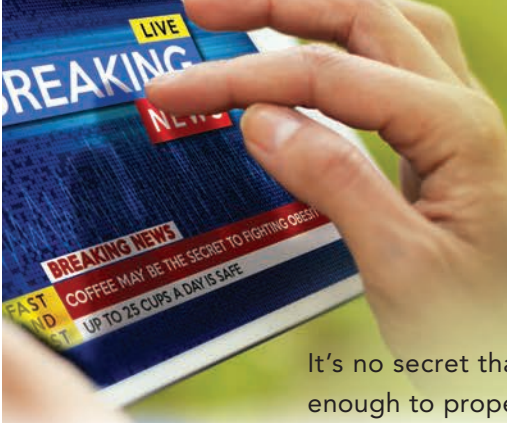
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SURPRISE!

THE BACKSTORY BEHIND THE HEADLINES

BY BONNIE LIEBMAN

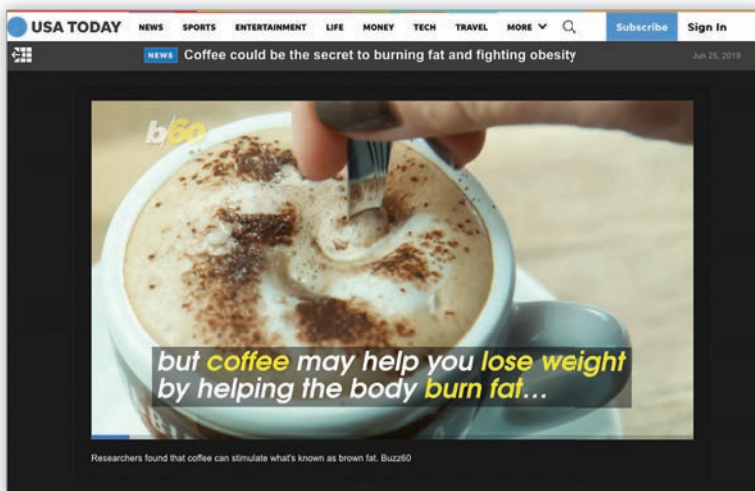
It's no secret that surprising headlines sell. Sometimes the "wow" factor is enough to propel a still-shaky finding into the spotlight before it's ready for prime time. Here's the backstory on some recent studies that made the news.

"Coffee could be the secret to burning fat and fighting obesity," reported *USA Today* in June.

The key: brown fat cells, which are "the body's internal fat fighters."

Adults have only a few ounces of brown fat in their bodies, most of it around the neck. So the study looked at brown fat activity—by measuring temperature in the neck—within one hour after drinking a coffee.¹

"The consumption of coffee increased the activity of brown fat, researchers found," said *USA Today*. "And the control, caffeine dissolved in water, had no impact on brown fat activity."



Actually, the control was plain water. But more to the point: it's a big leap from the results of this study—a scant cup of Nescafé (with 65 milligrams of caffeine) raised the temperature in the area above the col-

larbones of nine people—to "the secret to burning fat and fighting obesity."

What about weight loss? The study didn't look.

Of course, you can't just blame *USA Today* or other media.

"Could coffee be the secret to fighting obesity?" was the headline of the news release from the University of Nottingham, where the study was done.

Bottom Line: Don't expect coffee to help you lose weight, especially if you fancy Frappuccinos, Dunkin' Frozen Coffees, or other sugary coffee shakes.

¹ *Sci. Rep.* 9: 9104, 2019.



"Before you start feeling guilty about indulging in that guacamole, consider a new study from the Center for Nutrition Research at Illinois Institute of Technology that suggests the fat in avocado can help you suppress hunger and stay more satis-

fied longer," reported a *Reader's Digest* article on foxnews.com in May.

"On three different days, researchers fed 31 overweight or obese adults one of three meals with identical calories: A high-fat meal with one avocado, a high-fat meal with half an avocado, or a low-fat meal," explained the article.

"For six hours afterward, the volunteers reported how hungry they felt. Everyone reported feeling fuller longer after the meal featuring a whole avocado; even the meal with half an avocado helped satisfy the volunteers longer than the low-fat meal."

Gosh. That sounds like good news for the avocado industry, which funded the study—a detail that *Reader's Digest* left out. Here's the backstory.

First, the "low-fat meal" was actually a higher-sugar, lower-fiber meal.¹ It had 7 more teaspoons of added sugar and a

50 percent larger (white flour) bagel than the avocado meals. And half of the extra sugar came in a sugary drink, which is known to have a weak impact on satiety.

That said, the results were all over the place. People felt more "full" after both the whole avocado and the low-fat meal than after the half-avocado meal.

They felt more "satisfied" after the two avocado meals—but no more so with a whole than a half avocado. They were no more "hungry" after the half avocado than after the low-fat meal, and "desire to eat" was no different. Sheesh.

"This study proves that small, enjoyable changes in your diet like swapping a piece of bread for a yummy half-avocado can lead you to achieve your weight-loss goals," declared *Reader's Digest*. Seriously?

Bottom Line: Avocados are a healthful food, but the key to weight loss? Not quite.

¹ *Nutrients* 2019. doi:10.3390/nu11050952.

“New study claims a third of adults over 50 have a protein deficiency,” ran the online headline for a segment on ABC’s “[Good Morning America](#)” in February.

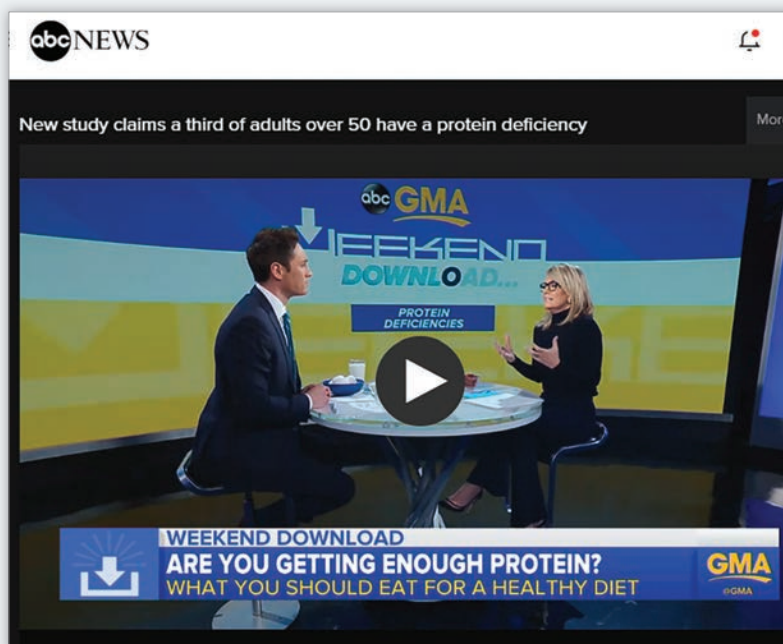
“They looked at over 11,000 adults over the age of 50,” explained GMA medical correspondent Jennifer Ashton.

“And they found that 30 to 50 percent of adults over the age of 50 were not getting anywhere close to the daily recommended protein allowance and they were also lacking in other micro-nutrients, so this wasn’t just about protein.”

Whoa. First, if your diet has less than the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for protein on one day, that doesn’t mean you have a protein *deficiency*. The RDA has a built-in cushion, so it’s more than what most people need.

Second, studies like this one, which ask people what they ate in a single day, are known to underestimate long-term intakes.

Third, the people who ate too little protein ate too little, period. They ate roughly 30 percent fewer calories than the



people who got the RDA for protein.¹ And they were more likely to have trouble when standing or sitting for long periods, walking up 10 steps, preparing meals, walking for a quarter mile, and stooping, crouching, or kneeling.

Did lack of protein cause those problems? Or did the problems help explain why those people ate too little food? This type of “cross-sectional” study—which is a snapshot in time—can’t tell.

Here’s what GMA missed: The study was funded by Abbott Nutrition, makers of Ensure. In

fact, two of the authors work for Abbott.

Would they have a reason to make older adults think they need more protein...say, from Ensure? Nah. Probably just a coincidence.

Bottom Line: As long as you’re eating enough food, odds are you’re getting enough protein. There’s plenty of protein in a typical diet.

¹ [J. Nutr. Health Aging 23: 338, 2019.](#)



“People with metabolic disorders may benefit from supplements of a common gut bacterium, a small pilot study suggests,” reported the [New York Times](#) in July.

“Researchers tested the bacterium, *Akkermansia muciniphila*, in 32 men and women who met the criteria for metabolic syndrome by having at least three of five conditions: high fasting blood sugar, high blood pressure, high triglycerides, low HDL (the ‘good’ cholesterol) or excessive waist circumference,” noted the *Times*.

The study randomly assigned people to take daily tablets with

live bacteria, pasteurized (dead) bacteria, or a placebo for three months.¹

“Compared with the placebo group, those who took pasteurized *A. muciniphila* had significantly improved insulin sensitivity and total cholesterol, and decreases in several blood markers of inflammation and liver dysfunction,” reported the *Times*.

“They also had decreased body weight, fat mass and waist circumference, though those differences were not statistically significant. The live bacteria were largely ineffective.”

Wait, what? Dead is better? And the difference in body weight was not significant, but the headline read “A probiotic for obesity?”

What’s more, the people who got the dead bacteria started the study with worse insulin sensitivity, so the three groups weren’t equal at the outset. Even the study’s title called it a “proof-of-concept” and “exploratory.”

Companies are already splashing “probiotics” on their labels with little evidence that they do anything. Headlines like this don’t help.

Oh, and five of the study’s authors have patents on using *A. muciniphila* to treat obesity. Two have started a company that will sell it.

Bottom Line: A probiotic for obesity? W-a-a-a-y too early.

¹ [Nat. Med. 25:1096, 2019.](#)

“According to a new study, women who slept with the television or light on gained 11 pounds or more compared to those who slept in the dark,” reported “NBC Nightly News” in June. “Using smart devices as you nod off could increase your risk of obesity by 33 percent.”

Yikes.

Before you get so worried that you can’t sleep, relax.

The study tracked roughly 43,700 women for nearly six years.¹ Those who slept with the light or TV on were 17 percent more likely to gain at least 11 pounds than those who slept in the dark. (It’s not true that they “gained 11 pounds or more compared to those who slept in the dark.”)

And women who slept with the light or TV on were 33 percent more likely to become obese over the six years. (The study didn’t ask about “smart devices.”)

Those errors aside, does something else



about women who sleep with a light or TV on explain why they are more likely to gain weight?

At the outset, those women were heavier and they were more likely to get less sleep, to take longer to fall asleep, to take naps, and to have an irregular sleeping routine.

So did the TV or light *cause* those problems? Or do poor sleepers watch TV to fall asleep? This study couldn’t say.

To their credit, the researchers took into

account factors like age, race, education, income, smoking, alcohol, caffeine, depression, and “perceived stress.”

But even they acknowledged that they could have missed something.

Sleeping with the light or TV on “might reflect a constellation of measures of socioeconomic disadvantage and unhealthy lifestyle behaviors, all of which could contribute to weight gain and obesity,” they wrote.

“We were unable to disentangle the temporal relationship between exposure to [artificial light at night] and other factors, including unhealthy diet, sedentary lifestyle, stress, and other sleep characteristics.”

Bottom Line: Have trouble sleeping? It wouldn’t hurt to try turning off the TV or smart devices.

¹ [JAMA Intern. Med. 2019. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2019.0571.](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2019.0571)

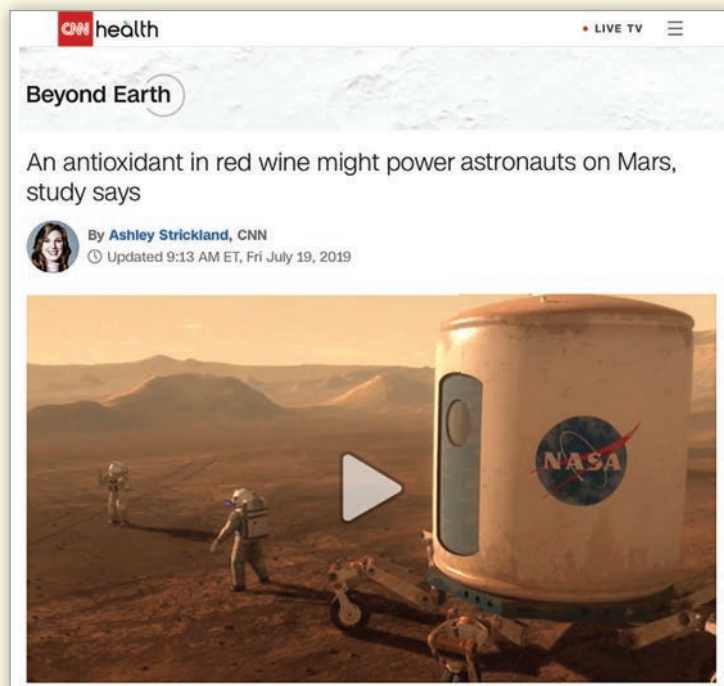
“The human body was built to function best with gravity as a grounding force, but astronauts on a mission to Mars could spend between six to nine months on a spacecraft without it,” explained the CNN article in July.

“But a new study published in the *Frontiers in Physiology* suggests that resveratrol, an antioxidant and compound found in blueberries and the skin of grapes, could be part of the dietary strategy that keeps astronauts strong on Mars.”

Antioxidant? That’s odd... because according to a CNN article from May, “resveratrol, previously labeled an ‘antioxidant,’ is actually an oxidant,” which can “lead to cell damage.”

(Resveratrol can be either one, depending largely on the dose.)

The July article eventually—in the 19th paragraph—got around to mentioning that the two-week study was done in rats, not humans.¹ (When suspended from the ceiling of their cage to



simulate the impact of Mars’s low gravity, the rats that got resveratrol lost less muscle than those that didn’t get resveratrol.)

But that didn’t stop CNN from making the compound sound like magic.

“Resveratrol, which has been studied regarding Alzheimer’s, has been found to be anti-inflammatory, anti-diabetic and antioxidative.”

Really? In two good human studies, resveratrol didn’t lower inflammation or blood sugar and raised LDL (“bad”) cholesterol.^{2,3} In another study, it *blunted* the benefits of exercise on LDL, triglycerides, and blood pressure.⁴

Bottom Line: Be wary of claims about resveratrol.

¹ [Front. Physiol. 2019. doi:10.3389/fphys.2019.00899.](https://doi.org/10.3389/fphys.2019.00899)

² [J. Clin. Endocrinol. Metab. 102: 1642, 2017.](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcem.2017.04.001)

³ [Am. J. Clin. Nutr. 103: 66, 2016.](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjcn.2016.05.001)

⁴ [J. Physiol. 591: 5047, 2013.](https://doi.org/10.1093/ajph/103.10.1711)

“Pizza, candy, chips and other processed, high-fat food can cause permanent damage to sperm, according to a new study from Harvard University,” reported a *New York Post* article on foxnews.com in June.

“The researchers studied nearly 3,000 men ages 18 to 20 and found that vegetarians and those with diets rich in fruit, veggies, chicken and fish had higher sperm counts than those on a ‘Western diet’ of processed meats and junk food.”

“The results will be presented this week at the annual European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology conference in Vienna.”

Red flag: When you hear that “results will be presented,” that’s usually a clue that the full study hasn’t been published. So the details are skimpy.

Judging by a summary, the men who ate the most-“Western” diets had 26 million fewer sperm per ejaculate than those who ate the least-“Western” diets.¹ “Western” meant pizza, chips, red meat, snacks, refined grains, high-calorie drinks, sweets, etc.

In contrast, those who ate the most-“Prudent” diets—high in fish, chicken, vegetables, fruit, and water—had 43 million more



sperm than those who ate the least-“Prudent” diets.

Sperm counts have dropped by roughly [60 percent](#) since 1973. That’s disturbing. And while this study found a link that might explain the drop, it sure doesn’t show that junk food *causes* damage to sperm.

“This was a cross-sectional study, which limits our ability to determine causality,” wrote the authors.

And where did the headline’s “irreversibly” come from?

“The researchers believe that processed foods damage the health of sperm-producing cells, or Sertoli cells,” said the article. “And though eating better can improve sperm health over time, Sertoli cells

cannot be recovered.”

The researchers *believe*? The “Western” eaters had lower levels of inhibin-B, which is made by Sertoli cells. That’s troubling, but it’s a long way from “believe” to “irreversibly damage.”

Bottom Line: Eat a healthy diet to lower your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. Infertility? Who knows?

¹ eshre.eu/ESHRE2019/Programme/Searchable#!abstractdetails/0000574200.



“People who drink up to 25 cups of coffee a day don’t run a greater risk of a

heart attack,” said [CNBC](#) in June.

“That’s the remarkable finding from a study of over 8,000 people in the U.K., carried out by the British Heart Foundation (BHF).”¹

It’s remarkable, all right ...because it’s not true. In fact, the BHF itself said so.

“News-papers were eager to declare that coffee has no harmful effects on the heart, which didn’t reflect the fact that the

study only measured one aspect of cardiovascular health: arterial stiffness,” explained the BHF.

“It didn’t look at other risks such as abnormal heart rhythms or cholesterol levels—which have both been linked to high coffee consumption in the past.”

What’s more, most of the media pounced on the 25-cups-a-day results.

“These misleading claims were based on the fact that the researchers excluded participants who drank more than 25 cups a day,” explained the BHF.

“However only two people in the study actually drank 25 cups of coffee a day.”

The group that drank the most coffee averaged 5 cups a day. (That’s two venti coffees

at Starbucks.)

The headlines led a journalist to try to drink 25 cups of coffee, said the BHF, which noted that “It could be dangerous to consume such a high quantity of caffeine. Thankfully he stopped his experiment after seven and a half cups, due to feeling nauseous, jittery and shaky.”

It wasn’t just CNBC. CNN, Fox, and others ran 25-cups headlines. But others resisted the clickbait.

“No, you probably shouldn’t drink 25 cups of coffee a day,” said *TIME* magazine. “Study suggests it’s OK to drink 25 cups of coffee a day. It’s not,” said the HuffPost. Bravo.

Bottom Line: Caffeine is a drug. Don’t overdo it. ☕

¹ Heart.2019.doi:10.1136/heartjnl-2019-BCS.9.

Quick Studies

A snapshot of the latest research on diet, exercise, and more.

Cutting Calories Pays Off



Animals live longer—and stay healthier—when they're put on a lower-calorie diet. Is that also true for humans?

To find out, the CALERIE study randomly assigned 218 people aged 21 to 50 to eat their regular diets or to cut calories by 25 percent. All were in the upper half of the “normal” or the lower half of the “overweight” range.

After two years, the calorie cutters had managed to trim their calories by only 12 percent—that is, by about 300 calories a day. That led to a drop in weight

(16 pounds), LDL (“bad”) cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, and C-reactive protein (a measure of inflammation), and an increase in insulin sensitivity and HDL (“good”) cholesterol.

What to do: Overweight or close to it? Consider cutting back on calories.

[Lancet Diabetes Endocrinol. 2019. doi:10.1016/S2213-8587\(19\)30151-2.](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-8587(19)30151-2)

Spicy Food Rescue?

Milk may help put out the fire of spicy foods better than other beverages.

People reported less “burn” after drinking spicy tomato juice if they followed it with milk (whole or skim) or Kool-Aid rather than water. They felt no less burn after seltzer, cola, or non-alcoholic beer.

What to do: Mouth on fire? Try milk.

[Physiol. Behav. 2019. doi:10.1016/j.physbeh.2019.05.018.](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physbeh.2019.05.018)



Feeling Depressed? Vitamin D Won't Help

Vitamin D doesn't help older people with symptoms of depression or walking difficulties.

Dutch scientists randomly assigned 151 people aged 60 to 80 to take either vitamin D (1,200 IU) or a placebo each day. While all had “depressive symptoms,” anyone with a diagnosis of major depressive disorder was excluded.

The participants also had at least one physical limitation (like difficulty walking, climbing stairs, rising from a chair, or dressing) and low blood levels of vitamin D (6 to 20 nanograms per milliliter in the winter or 6 to 28 ng/mL in the summer).

After one year, the vitamin D takers fared no better with their symptoms or limitations than the placebo takers.

What to do: Don't expect vitamin D to alleviate symptoms of depression or problems with walking, rising, dressing, etc. 🍌

[Am. J. Clin. Nutr. 2019. doi:10.1093/ajcn/nqz141.](https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqz141)

Watch Your Waist



Women with a large waist have a higher risk of dying even if they're normal weight.

Researchers tracked roughly 156,600 postmenopausal women for 18 years. Those who were normal weight but had a large waist (at least 35 inches) had a 31 percent higher risk of dying of any cause than normal-weight women with a less-than-35-inch waist.

A large waist was linked to a greater risk of dying of cancer as well as a greater risk of dying of a heart attack or stroke.

Something else about women with a large waist could explain their higher risk (though the study took age, education, income, smoking, exercise, diet, and other factors into account). But other evidence links belly fat to heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers.

What to do: No matter what you weigh, watch your waist.

[JAMA Netw. Open 2019. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.7337.](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.7337)



DOE HOLLYWOOD?

How celebrities shape our views about health

Detox diets, colonics, weight-loss lollipops, crystals for courage, and IV vitamin therapy. Celebrities now endorse a slew of diets, supplements, exercise routines, and other health fads. Here's how to dodge their influence.



Timothy Caulfield is the research director of the Health Law Institute at the University of Alberta in Canada. He

is the author of *Is Gwyneth Paltrow Wrong About Everything? How the Famous Sell Us Elixirs of Health, Beauty & Happiness* and the host and co-producer of "A User's Guide to Cheating Death," a documentary series on alternative health practices. Caulfield spoke to *Nutrition Action's* Caitlin Dow.

Q: Which health trends endorsed by celebrities concern you?

A: There are so many to choose from. Without a doubt, celebrities like Jenny McCarthy have had an impact on the anti-vax movement. But some of my favorite examples of celebrity-endorsed, science-free bunk therapies include colonics, intravenous vitamin therapies, supplements, and homeopathy.

Celebrity culture has also pushed unproven diets that have stuck. An example I love is the gluten-free diet.

Here's a diet that's essential for people with celiac disease, which is about 1 percent of the population. Even if you include the more controversial diagnosis of non-celiac gluten sensitivity, you add only a few percentage points more.

But depending on the survey, up to 30 percent of the population has bought

into this diet. That's huge. Despite the fact that it has been debunked, people go gluten-free because they believe it's healthier and will help them lose weight.

Q: Do people actually trust celebrities for health advice?

A: I think it's more that celebrities have influence. But across the board, trust in [traditional sources](#) like physicians and scientists has declined.

And some people don't feel satisfied with their interactions with conventional healthcare providers. That makes space for alternative perspectives.

Q: What about celebrity doctors like Dr. Oz and Deepak Chopra?

A: In some ways, they're worse because they're more trusted because they're part of a profession that is supposed to be dedicated to adopting a science-informed approach. But they're often spreading nonsense.

Q: Do people think that they're not influenced by celebrities?

A: Yes. Many people would say that only gullible people are influenced by pop culture. And that's not true.

You may not follow them or pay attention to them, but because celebrities dominate pop culture and can circulate these crazy ideas very efficiently, they influence all of us.

One way is the mere ex-

posure effect. It's how fake news works. Just being exposed to a crazy idea enough times can make it seem plausible.

Q: And celebrities might represent the kind of person you want to be?

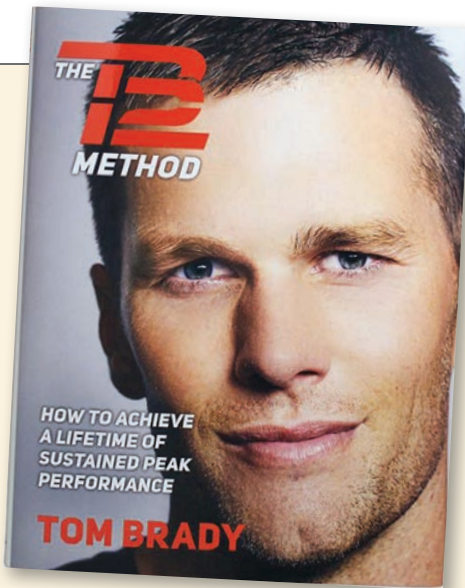
A: That's right. It's called the [Prius effect](#). "I'm the kind of person who drives a Prius." Or, in terms of health, "I'm the kind of person who drinks lemon water, practices yoga, and eats only organic food."

Once our choices become part of our identity, it's easy to find information that confirms our views.

So you may not think that Gwyneth Paltrow is a good source of information, but she may speak to your personal brand. And that can open the door to buying into her off-the-wall ideas like bee-sting therapy and vaginal steaming.



Gwyneth Paltrow's lifestyle empire, Goop—which includes a [website](#), magazine, podcast, a few brick-and-mortar boutiques, and an upcoming Netflix [show](#)—peddles science-free products like colonics, cleanses, coffee enemas, and crystals that you carry around for serenity, clarity, etc. Last year, Goop [settled](#) a \$145,000 lawsuit over unsubstantiated claims that its vaginal Jade Egg could balance hormones, regulate menstrual cycles, and prevent uterine prolapse.



According to *The TB12 Method*, Tom Brady limits alcohol, caffeine, and refined carbs and avoids dairy and nightshade vegetables (like eggplant, peppers, and tomatoes). Why? Brady claims that his diet is anti-inflammatory, neutralizes his blood's acidity, boosts athletic performance, and aids in muscle recovery. But diet has little or no impact on the blood's pH, and there's no evidence that Brady's diet makes him (or anyone else) a better athlete.

Q: Do celebrities have greater sway over the public than in the past?

A: My research is trying to measure just how much impact celebrities have.

But we know that how we interact with celebrities has changed, thanks largely to social media. Celebrities own social media. Kim Kardashian has 145 million Instagram followers, whereas the World Health Organization has just under two million. Celebrities have a massive cultural footprint.

And this isn't a picture of Grace Kelly on the cover of *Life* magazine. It's a celebrity posting a picture on Instagram from her bathroom. We feel closer to them, and we feel like they're speaking to us.

Q: Has that changed advertising?

A: Yes. Companies advertise through celebrities on social media because the interaction feels authentic, not like a normal ad, even though it's completely curated. And messaging that feels authentic is powerful.

There's also interesting [research](#) suggesting that people trust and are influenced by someone like them or who they can relate to. So the advertising that you see on Instagram via celebrities plays to

that. Many don't even look like ads. They may seem like an unpaid endorsement.

Q: Many celebrities, like quarterback Tom Brady, are pushing diets that are high in fruits and vegetables and low in junk food. So what's the harm?

A: Brady claims that his diet boosts energy, enhances athletic performance, and speeds recovery.

He makes it sound like you have to adopt an extreme approach that's restrictive or complicated to be healthy.

Whether it's Tom or Gwyneth or another celebrity, they make it seem like

there's magic that can transform your life. But healthy eating is much simpler than that.

Q: How else may people be harmed?

A: If you're taking an unproven therapy or avoiding vaccinations, it can cause physical harm. And some people are being distracted from proven therapies, like opting for [alternative cancer treatments](#) instead of getting conventional treatment like chemotherapy.

There's also financial harm. People are wasting money on things that don't work.

And many alternative modalities are based on magical thinking. If you get swept up in that, it may erode your critical thinking. That may be the most important long-term harm.

Q: Because these therapies are rooted in pseudoscience?

A: I call it scienceploitation. You see health fads justified using scientific terminology like quantum physics, stem cell therapy, or epigenetics.

The average person can't sort through these complicated topics. It's even a lot of work for doctors, scientists, and science communicators to tease out the real science from the fake stuff.

Q: What are some red flags that people should look for?

A: Remember that testimonials and anecdotes are not evidence. Look for actual research on a topic.

Also consider what the body of evidence says on the topic, because that's what's important. Don't make changes to your health based on a single study.

And be skeptical of practices that are billed as new and cutting edge. They're usually just pseudoscience. 🍌



Last year, Kim Kardashian posted a sponsored Instagram post for Flat Tummy lollipops. (Their saffron extract is supposed to curb appetite, but the evidence is [weak](#).) Her other sponsored posts include SugarBearHair vitamins, Olay Regenerist Whip facial moisturizer, The Queen Pegasus Lash Elixir Kit, and the morning sickness medication Bonjesta. In a recent court filing, Kardashian reported making up to half a million dollars per post.

BY LINDSAY MOYER

Cauliphony



" $\frac{1}{3}$ of our classic crust is made with cauliflower," says the label of Oprah's **O That's Good! Classic Crust...with a Twist of Cauliflower Fire Roasted Veggie Pizza**.

Too bad few people are likely to notice the small print in the corner: "One serving does not provide a significant amount ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) of the USDA daily recommendations for vegetables."

Translation: The crust, fire-roasted veggies, and tomato sauce together don't even add up to a measly $\frac{1}{2}$ cup for each $\frac{1}{8}$ -pizza serving (which has about the same calories and carbs as a similar-size serving of, say, a DiGiorno vegetable pizza).

O that's not so good!

On the upside, **Green Giant's frozen Cauliflower Pizza Crust** is "made with over 80% cauliflower" and has roughly "50% fewer calories than regular pizza crust." (Like all cauliflower crusts, it needs something to hold itself together. Green Giant uses rice flour, corn starch, corn flour, and cornmeal.)

What makes your product stand out? Surely, your marketing department can think of something. You could add veggies, almond butter, probiotics, or protein...or take away something like

The information for this article was compiled by Suraya Bunting.

Paleo Chips?



"Instead of using typical grains like corn or rice, our grain free paleo tortilla chips are made with root vegetables and seeds," says **Garden of Eatin' Grain Free Tortilla Chips**.

Which root vegetables? There's just one: cassava—"a starchy root vegetable that is a major staple carbohydrate in various countries," says the bag.

Sounds a lot like some other root vegetable. Oh yeah. Potatoes. Maybe someone could make chips out of them, too!

Probiotic Ploy



"3 billion live cultures for your microbiome," says the **Culture Republic + Probiotics Turmeric Chai & Cinnamon Light Ice Cream** label.

Just what we need—a new reason to eat more ice cream! Why stop at a 160-calorie serving ($\frac{2}{3}$ cup) when you can eat the entire 470-calorie pint and get all 3 billion cultures at once?

Actually, Culture Republic does less damage than most ice creams. It's just that the probiotic (*Bacillus coagulans* GBI-30 6086) doesn't seem to do much for your gut or GI symptoms. The evidence—partly funded by the probiotic's manufacturer—is unimpressive.

What does it do? Help sell foods like ice cream, chocolate, granola, trail mix, bars, and chips.

Simply Skip It



"Introducing 100% real fruit smoothies," says **Simply Smoothie's website**.

"Nothing to chop or blend or clean up to enjoy this homemade taste."

Sounds like each 180-calorie bottle of the **Orchard Berry**, for example, is mostly berries tossed into a blender. You should be so lucky.

The first ingredient (printed in barely legible skimpy white type) is apple juice. Then come strawberry, apple, banana, and pear purées, followed by grape juice and blueberry purée. There's also lemon juice plus "natural flavors."

Apparently, it's not easy to make apple juice taste like berries.

And juice doesn't curb your hunger like biting into a juicy piece of fresh fruit...straight from a real orchard.

OR HYPE?

& BONNIE LIEBMAN

grain or gluten. So what if it doesn't actually make the food much healthier, as long as you make the sale? Thanks to the hype, these items look healthier than they are.

Veggies Made Gimmick



"Veggies: our #1 ingredient," says the **Veggies Made Great Double Chocolate Muffins** box.

Yes, zucchini and carrots are the first two ingredients, followed mostly by sugar, egg whites, eggs, cocoa powder, chocolate chips, and corn starch. (The muffins are gluten-free.)

But the vegetables are #1 only because they're about 90 percent water, which makes them heavy.

That's one reason to eat veggies: They fill you up

without many calories. Bake 'em into a double chocolate muffin, though, and you're not eating veggies made great. You're eating a double chocolate muffin with a clever marketing shtick.

Almond Candy?

Golly! **Justin's Almond Butter Covered Almonds** seems to have wrapped organic almonds in organic almond butter.

What an impeccable snack!

Except that the "almond butter" coating has more rice starch, palm kernel oil, and cane sugar than almond butter. And each bag holds three 1 oz. servings, so you could easily swallow its 540 calories without noticing.

Why not just eat almonds?



Faux-gurt?

What are those little boxes next to the yogurts in the dairy case?

"We're the type of people who eat yogurt with our hands," says the **Clío Blueberry Greek Yogurt Bar** package.

Huh? Since when is a "yogurt bar" the same as a yogurt?

They may have about the same calories (140), but many of the bar's calories come from blueberry jam and chocolate (mostly cocoa, sugar, and palm oil) instead of yogurt.

That's why each Clío bar has only 4 percent of a day's calcium, rather than the 15 percent in a typical (5.3 oz.) greek yogurt. (Whey boosts Blueberry Clío's protein to 8 grams—still not quite the 10 to 12 grams in a flavored greek yogurt.)

"Real food needs refrigeration," says Clío. Real food? If it weren't for that added protein (and the live cultures), a Clío would be closer to a Mini Klondike bar than a yogurt.

Dessert Hummus

"Enjoy with fruit, pretzels & crackers," says **Boar's Head Dark Chocolate Dessert Hummus**.

Yep. It's finally happened. Someone has turned hummus into dessert. All it took was some sugar, cocoa powder, and vanilla extract.

The **Chocolate Raspberry** flavor is a "seasonal selection." Maybe its raspberries go out of season, but aren't its "raspberry powder" and "raspberry flavor" available all year long?

Even with 6 or 7 grams of added sugar in just two tablespoons, dessert hummus beats frosting. Of course, hummus beats dessert hummus. But remember: a serving (of any hummus) is only two level tablespoons...and around 70 or 80 calories. For a lot of folks, that's just the beginning. 🍓



The Healthy Cook

On a Roll



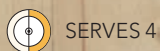
Simple. Fast. Tasty. What's not to like about meatballs? Add ½ cup cooked brown rice and 2 cups steamed or roasted broccoli to each serving, and dinner is done. 🍴

Asian Chicken Meatballs

- 1 Tbs. peanut or grapeseed oil
- 1 egg
- 1 lb. ground chicken breast
- 4 scallions (3 minced + 1 thinly sliced)
- ½ red bell pepper, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tbs. + 1 Tbs. minced ginger
- 1 Tbs. + 2 Tbs. reduced-sodium soy sauce
- ½ cup whole wheat panko bread crumbs
- 1 tsp. toasted sesame oil
- 2 tsp. balsamic vinegar
- ½ tsp. brown sugar
- 2 Tbs. toasted sesame seeds

1. Preheat the oven to 475°F. Coat a large lined rimmed baking pan with the oil.
2. In a large bowl, lightly beat the egg. Mix in the chicken, minced scallions, bell pepper, garlic, 1 Tbs. ginger, 1 Tbs. soy sauce, and bread crumbs. Form the mixture into about 20 small meatballs of about 2 Tbs. each and place them on the pan.
3. Roast the meatballs on the top oven rack until cooked through, 10-12 minutes.
4. In a small bowl, mix the sliced scallion with the remaining 1 Tbs. ginger and 2 Tbs. soy sauce and the sesame oil, vinegar, and sugar.
5. Divide the meatballs into four bowls. Top with the sesame seeds. Serve with the sauce.

PER SERVING (5 meatballs with sauce + ½ cup cooked brown rice + 2 cups broccoli): calories 440 | total fat 13 g | sat fat 2.5 g | carbs 46 g | fiber 7 g | total sugar 5 g | added sugar 1 g | protein 37 g | sodium 570 mg



SERVES 4



Want more recipes?

Go to
nutritionaction.com/meatballs
for my spin on

**Italian Chicken Meatballs
with Marinara**

**Southwest Chicken Meatballs
with Smoky Tahini Sauce**

Need cooking advice? Write to Chef Kate at
healthycook@cspinet.org.

Breakfast on the Run

A quick guide to coffee shops

BY LINDSAY MOYER

What's new—and what's good—at Starbucks, Panera, and other coffee shops? Here's how to pick or customize your way to better sandwiches, boxes, bowls, bites, beverages, and more. Our examples are from chains, but the advice should hold up pretty much anywhere.

Kaamilah Mitchell and Suraya Bunting compiled the information for this article.

Egg Sandwiches

Some of the best egg sandwiches:

■ **Panera.** The yummy **Avocado, Egg White & Spinach** with cheese and tomatoes (on Panera's 62% whole-grain bagel flat) beats just about any sandwich on the menu, especially those with bacon, ham, or sausage. (Processed meats are linked to a higher risk of colorectal cancer.)

Tip: You can drop the meat or add avocado (79 cents) to any Panera sandwich.

■ **Starbucks.** Go for the 230-calorie **Reduced-Fat Turkey Bacon & Cage Free Egg White**, which comes on a part-



Avocado, egg whites, tomato, spinach? Well done, Panera.

whole-grain English muffin. (Try it sans bacon.) It trounces the 500-calorie sandwiches that come on croissants.

■ **Au Bon Pain.** Ask for egg whites and avocado on a skinny wheat bagel, which is all whole grain.

And wherever you are, customize. (It's easier if the chain has an app.) Even **McDonald's** will drop the Canadian bacon and add tomatoes (for 50 cents or so) to an **Egg McMuffin**.

LOOK FOR: Whole grains, and veggies or avocado instead of processed meats.



Try Panera's Mediterranean Wrap.

Wraps

Why not try a wrap? They're often at least half whole-grain and roomy enough to stuff in a few veggies. Some of our picks:

■ **Panera.** The **Mediterranean Egg White**—egg whites, feta, tomatoes, spinach, and white bean pesto on a 63% whole-grain wrap—is a

winner. The **Chipotle Chicken, Scrambled Egg & Avocado** is also decent (skip the gouda cheese).

■ **Starbucks.** The sodium (830 milligrams) in the **Spinach, Feta & Cage Free Egg White Wrap** is higher than Panera's Mediterranean wrap (650 mg), and its spinach isn't as tasty as Panera's fresh greens. But a sandwich with no ham, bacon, or sausage? Beats the rest at the 'bucks.

LOOK FOR: A veggie-rich wrap.



Cutting back on carbs? Get Egg Bites.

Egg Bites & Beyond

Want eggs but not in a sandwich? Bypass Panera's petite **Baked Egg Soufflés**. Each has enough croissant

dough and cheese to supply some 500-plus calories and a day's worth of saturated fat. Instead, try:

■ **Egg Bites.** Starbucks' **Egg White & Red Pepper Sous Vide Egg Bites** (egg whites, cheese, veggies) offer 13 grams of protein per 170-calorie, two-bite order.

■ **Bowls.** Some small chains like **Le Pain Quotidien** and **Bluestone Lane** offer breakfast bowls with an egg perched atop kale, cabbage, and avocado. Imagine that!

LOOK FOR: Less white flour and cheese.

Egg & Fruit Boxes

In a pinch, **Starbucks' Eggs & Cheese Protein Box** is a solid breakfast. For 470 calories, you get two hard-boiled eggs, a cup of fruit (apples and grapes), a few slivers of white cheddar cheese, plus a hunk of bread and a packet of peanut butter spread.

It's got less than a teaspoon of added sugar and just a quarter of a day's sodium. Too bad the "multigrain" muesli



Pack your own "protein box."

bread is mostly white flour.

Want to sidestep the white flour—and the single-use plastic—in Starbucks' and other chains' boxes? Pack your own fresh fruit, egg or nuts, and maybe a whole-grain mini bagel in a reusable container.

LOOK FOR: Some chains sell hard-boiled eggs alone. Add a piece of fresh fruit, and breakfast is served.



Our tasters' favorite: Panera's steel-cut oats with quinoa.

Oatmeal

Oatmeal is 100% whole grain...and just about everywhere. Some tips:

■ **Sugar.** Most oats are sweetened with 1 to 3 teaspoons of added sugar. **Starbucks'** brown sugar or agave syrup comes in a packet, so it's easy to skip or cut back. Most chains will leave it out if you ask.

■ **Texture.** Our favorites: chewy, nutty steel-cut oats at **Corner Bakery Cafe** and **Panera**. Runner-up: **Au Bon Pain's** creamy rolled oats. All three beat the just-add-water oats at McDonald's and Starbucks.

■ **Toppings.** Fresh fruit—like in **Starbucks' Hearty Blueberry Oatmeal**—isn't easy to come by. Second best: dried fruit and nuts. The chocolate chips on **Au Bon Pain's** self-serve toppings bar turn breakfast into dessert.

LOOK FOR: A way to skip the added sugar.



Yogurt

Too bad many parfaits layer only a smattering of (sweetened) fruit between (sweetened) granola and (sweetened) yogurt.

For example, a **Starbucks Berry Trio Parfait** (nonfat vanilla yogurt, berries, granola) has 4 teaspoons of added sugar. That's a

third of a day's limit. The **Lemon Crunch Parfait** has no whole fruit and 26 grams (6 tsp.) of added sugar, thanks in part to its sugary lemon curd.

Consider this: Many Starbucks sell **Siggis' yogurt**. A 5.3 oz. **0% Vanilla** has a mere teaspoon of added sugar, but just as much protein (15 grams) as either parfait. It also packs less than half the calories (110). Want fruit? Add a banana. Most Starbucks stock them near the cash register.

LOOK FOR: Plain (or less-sweet) yogurt and fresh fruit.

Baked Goods

Most of the bakery case is white flour, sugar, and butter, cream, or oil.

■ **Doughnuts & scones.** Expect 300 to 400 calories of mostly white flour plus sugar and a quarter to half a day's saturated fat (thanks to doughnuts' palm oil and scones' butter and cream).

■ **Croissants & danish.** These uber-buttered pastries reach half to three-quarters of a day's sat fat and 300 to 500 calories.

■ **Muffins & cinnamon rolls.** They're usually oversized



Schmear nut butter, hummus, or avocado on half a whole-grain bagel.

(400 to 600 calories). And we're talking around 10 teaspoons of added sugar. Even bran muffins—if you can find them—can hit 400 calories.

■ **Whole-grain bagels.** Even many "whole grain" or "sprouted grain" bagels (300 calories without cream cheese) are roughly half white flour.

LOOK FOR: Half a whole-grain bagel (or a piece of toast) schmear

with a healthier fat—nut butter, hummus, or mashed avocado—rather than cream cheese.

Coffee Drinks

A shot of espresso, an Americano (espresso plus water), or a coffee has next to no calories (about 5). Each packet of sugar adds 10 to 20.

The takeaway: The best drinks mix coffee or espresso with milk, water, or ice, not sugary syrups, cream, or whipped cream.

Here's a quick rundown. All numbers are for **Starbucks** grandes (16 oz.), unless noted:

■ **Iced coffee.** Go unsweetened to skip the syrup's 5 teaspoons of sugar.

■ **Cold foam.** Try the new **Cold Brew with Cold Foam**. It's 35 calories' worth of cold-brewed coffee topped with cold nonfat milk foamed with a little vanilla syrup. That beats the 80-calorie **Cascara Cold Foam** (about 3 teaspoons of added sugar) and the 230-calorie **Salted Cream Cold Foam** (about 4½ tsp.).

■ **Cappuccino, misto, or latte.** A cappuccino's espresso plus foamed nonfat milk means just 80 calories and a nice dose of calcium (255 milligrams) and protein (8 grams). It's



For iced drinks, cold foam beats whipped cream.

about the same as a nonfat misto (coffee with steamed milk). A nonfat latte has more milk, calcium (450 mg), protein (13 grams), and calories (130).

■ **Sweetened espresso drinks.** The **Cocoa Cloud Macchiato** (300 calories), **Cinnamon Dolce Latte** (340), and **White Chocolate Mocha** (430) go from bad to worse.

■ **Frozen blended drinks.** Think of **Frapuccinos** and their competitors as caffeinated milkshakes. At **Panera**, the **Frozen Cold Brew** drinks blend cold brew concentrate with nearly 500 calories' worth of half and half, sugar, chocolate or caramel syrup, and whipped cream. A large **Dunkin' Frozen Coffee** (mostly light cream and sugar) tops 800.

■ **Skip the whip.** It adds at least 70 calories of cream and sugar.

LOOK FOR: An espresso or Americano, or a coffee, cappuccino, misto, or regular latte. See "What Milk?" for milk tips.

What Milk?

Prefer dairy in your coffee? Try nonfat or 1%. (Ask for half nonfat, half 2% if they don't have 1%.)

Plant milks—which often come with added calcium—have pros and cons (see Jan./Feb. 2018, p. 13):

■ **Soy milk.** It has nearly as much protein as dairy milk but is usually sweetened. A 16 oz. **Starbucks grande Soy Latte** has more added sugar (4 teaspoons) than it needs.

■ **Almond milk.** If you're looking for protein, look elsewhere. As for sugar, it varies. For example, a 16 oz. **Panera Almond Milk Latte** has no added sugar (but no added calcium). At **Starbucks**, the same-size latte has a teaspoon of added sugar. At **Dunkin'**, it's 3½ tsp. in a medium (14 oz.) latte, thanks to vanilla almond milk.

■ **Coconut milk.** At **Starbucks**, it has more calories than almond milk, yet no more protein. Why bother?

LOOK FOR: Nonfat or 1% milk, or (preferably unsweetened) soy or almond milk.



Go for dairy, soy, or almond over coconut milk.

Tea Lattes

Lattes made with espresso typically have no added sugar unless they're flavored with caramel, mocha, vanilla, etc. But tea lattes vary.

Take **Starbucks**:

■ **Chai Latte.** Its sugar and honey come pre-mixed in



You can't always dodge the added sugar in matcha or chai lattes.

the "chai tea concentrate," so you can't leave out the estimated 7 teaspoons of added sugar in a 240-calorie grande (16 oz.). That's more than half a day's max.

■ **Matcha Latte.** You also can't dodge the sugar that's added to the "matcha tea blend." A grande has 3 teaspoons, we estimate. A **Matcha Lemonade** gets its added sugar (about 6½ tsp.) from the tea blend and lemonade.

■ **Black tea lattes.** The **London Fog** and **Royal English Breakfast Tea Lattes** are brewed tea with steamed milk and syrup. Ask for no syrup or get just a single pump (about a teaspoon's worth). Don't worry. With the milk, they're plenty sweet.

LOOK FOR: Unsweetened tea lattes...or plain old brewed tea. ☕



RIGHT STUFF

Tiny Tomatoes



Ah, summer. June through September is a tomato lollapalooza. But once the season is over, all bets are off.

What's a tomato lover to do?

Think small. Tiny yet mighty cherry or grape tomatoes are the sweet antidote to pale supermarket 'maters that are picked green and ripened off the vine. Look for red, orange, or yellow gems that are smooth, plump, and unwrinkled. A big brand: **Sunset**.

Sunset also markets **Sweet Bites**, **Flavor Bombs**, and **Sugar Bombs**—extra-sweet cherry and grape tomatoes that are still on the vine. (Tomatoes that have no stem can lose moisture through the top, so they're less juicy.)

For slightly larger tomatoes, try **Mini Kumatos**, **Campari**, or **cocktail**.

Keep whole tomatoes on the counter-top, not in the fridge. Cold temps not only slow ripening (and turn flesh mealy), but can also sap flavor. The good news: cold does the least damage to cherry or grape tomatoes, which are sold ripe. So if you're not going to use them soon, go ahead; toss 'em in the fridge.

Both make the perfect year-round snack, with just 25 measly calories per cup. And tomatoes have plenty of vitamin C, plus a decent dose of vitamin A and potassium.

Have any tomatoes that are about to pass their prime? Start smacking your lips. Sauté or roast them (see Dish of the Month), then toss with beans or whole wheat pasta or other grains. To-mmm-ato.

sunsetgrown.com—(844) 476-9648

Photos: sebra/stock.adobe.com (top left), IHOP (top right), Kate Sherwood & William Yore/CSPi (middle).

FOOD PORN



IBurp

"Our pancakes and Steakburger had a baby!" says proud IHOP.

The **Big IHOP Pancake Burger** is "a world-famous buttermilk pancake griddle with Cheddar



cheese and layered between two premium Steakburger patties, then topped with American cheese, custom-cured hickory-smoked bacon and our signature IHOP sauce."

What proud parents! Who wouldn't want enough white flour, meat, cheese, and sauce to supply 1,310 calories?

With fries for your side, you're up to 1,630 calories plus 39 grams (two days' worth) of saturated fat and

3,930 milligrams (a 1½-day supply) of sodium. It's like eating two McDonald's Quarter Pounders with Cheese plus two Egg McMuffins.

Too bad the Pancake Burger was for a limited time only. Now that it's gone, you'll have to settle for IHOP's other new burgers—the **Garlic Butter** and **Loaded Philly**. Unfortunately, each packs a mere 800-plus calories without fries.

"Last year, the Internet told us to stick to pancakes," said IHOP on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com). "Well, we heard you..."

You did? What's next? Pancakes in your BLTs, biscuits, wraps, and milkshakes? Surely you can find other ways to sell cheap white flour...with a side of fries, of course.

IHOP.com—(866) 444-5144



DISH of the month

Roasted Tomatoes

Halve 2 pints of small tomatoes. Toss with 2 Tbs. olive oil and a few sprigs of thyme. Roast on a large lined, rimmed baking sheet at 375°F for 25-30 minutes. Store in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.

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