SALT WARS

An interview with CSPI founder Michael Jacobson about his new book

REFLUX RELIEF?

America’s health by the numbers

The best NUTS & SEEDS
It’s time to dust off the nation’s advice for healthy eating. Every five years, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) update the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The Guidelines are used to set standards for healthy school lunches, home-delivered meals for seniors, and nutrition education programs, and to inform the advice given by many health professionals.

A distinguished panel of experts has examined the science that will be used to create the 2020–2025 Guidelines. In July, the panel issued its Scientific Report.

When that advisory committee was appointed, some observers were worried about the number of members who had ties to the food industry. But, in the end, they stuck to the science. The report largely aligns with recommendations that Nutrition Action and its publisher, the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), have made for years. Among the highlights:

■ Cut saturated fat and cholesterol. Keep both as low as possible within a healthy dietary pattern. Limit saturated fat to less than 10 percent of calories—that’s 20 grams a day for a 2,000-calorie diet—by replacing some sat fat with unsaturated fat from nuts, seeds, oils, and seafood.

■ Slash added sugars. Less than 6 percent of our calories should come from added sugars (down from 10 percent in the prior Guidelines). That’s just 30 grams, or 7 teaspoons, a day...less than the 39 grams in a single can of Coke or the 50-gram current Daily Value.

■ Limit alcohol. That means no more than one drink a day for all adults (prior Guidelines recommended no more than two drinks a day for men).

The panel didn’t look at salt. Instead, the new Guidelines rely on a solid 2019 National Academy of Medicine report that advised adults to limit sodium to 2,300 milligrams a day.

All in all, the report is a remarkably clear upholding of strong advice on diet and health. But we can’t let our guard down just yet. The report is now at the USDA and HHS, an opaque stage in the process from which parts of the final Guidelines have emerged diluted or industry-friendly in years past. We’ll be pushing to make sure they stick to the science.

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

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Nearly all experts agree that we should eat less salt. But opposition from the food industry and a handful of scientists has stalled efforts to cut the salt in the two biggest sources: packaged and restaurant foods.

Roughly 70 percent comes from the salt and other food additives like monosodium glutamate that are added to processed and restaurant foods.

Q: Can’t people just take drugs to lower their pressure?
A: Drugs can be very effective in lowering blood pressure and the risk of heart attacks and strokes, but they’re hardly the perfect answer. Many people stop taking the drugs over time because of the expense or because they don’t feel any effect.

And one drug may not work, so you have to take two or three, and even that may not work. Drugs can also have side effects like disturbed sleep, headache, muscle cramps, an increased need to urinate, and erectile dysfunction.

So why not just try to keep your blood pressure low so you can avoid the side effects and the costs and the visits to doctors.

Q: Which foods are the biggest culprits?
A: Salt is everywhere. It’s in processed meats like bacon and cold cuts, frozen dinners, soups, pizza, sandwiches. Breads and rolls supply more sodium than any other food category—in part because we eat them so often—but they supply only 6 percent of the salt we eat.

The foods that are highest in salt are restaurant meals. Some contain two or even three times as much sodium as somebody should eat in an entire day.

For 46 years after he earned a PhD from MIT, Jacobson led CSPI’s efforts to improve the nation’s diet. He spoke to Nutrition Action’s Bonnie Liebman about his new book, Salt Wars: The Battle Over the Biggest Killer in the American Diet. The book, from MIT Press, will be in bookstores on October 20.
New York City and Philadelphia now require menus at chain restaurants to put warnings next to items that contain an entire day’s worth of sodium or more.

Q: So it’s not just salty-tasting foods?
A: Right. Nobody thinks bread tastes salty, but at Panera, the piece of baguette that comes on the side has nearly six times as much sodium as the chips. So you can’t go by taste. You have to read labels. And restaurant foods don’t come with sodium labels, though many chain restaurants post the numbers online.

Q: So what should people do?
A: You can eat a healthy diet with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, beans, nuts, low-fat yogurt or milk, fish, and poultry, rather than processed foods. That will not only lower your sodium intake but also boost your potassium intake.

Potassium has long been known to lower blood pressure in people with hypertension. So replacing sodium with potassium could be a win-win. When cooking, I routinely use a lite salt, which is half sodium chloride and half potassium chloride.

Just check with your doctor before you use potassium salts if you have kidney disease or heart failure, or if you take drugs like ACE inhibitors, angiotensin II receptor blockers, or potassium-sparing diuretics.

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**THE SCIENCE WAR**

Q: What do you mean by Salt Wars?
A: One war is the battle over the scientific evidence. The other is over what government and industry should do about salt.

Q: Isn’t the science settled now?
A: It’s settled to most scientists and to health authorities like the National Academy of Medicine, the World Health Organization, and the American Heart Association. They recommend that we consume about a third less sodium. But a few vocal scientists argue that consuming less salt would be dangerous.

Q: What do they contend?
A: Their studies find a higher risk of heart attacks and strokes not only in people who consume excess sodium—say, 5,000 milligrams a day—but also in those who consume below-average levels—around 2,000 milligrams.

On the surface, some of those studies appear persuasive. For example, the PURE study looked at 100,000 people worldwide. But the studies are misleading.

Q: And that’s inaccurate?
A: Right. But the most serious flaw is that those studies didn’t accurately measure how much sodium people typically consume.

The only reliable way to estimate someone’s long-term sodium intake is to have them collect all of their urine for 24 hours on several days.

But the PURE researchers estimated each participant’s sodium intake with only one “spot” urine collection—meaning that each person urinated into a container just once—at the beginning of the study. Then the researchers used a mathematical formula to estimate 24-hour sodium intakes.

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**Blood Pressure: On the Way Up**

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In the 75+ age group, 80% of men and 86% of women have high blood pressure.
24-hour sodium intakes. A mathematical formula to estimate the study. Then the researchers used a container just once—at the beginning of the study. Each person urinated into a container only once, which is called a “spot” urine collection. The researchers measured each participant’s sodium intake with this method.

To put the nail in the coffin, a few years later, a meta-analysis of the Italian studies was retracted. When the journal asked the researchers to supply the raw data from some of the studies, they said that it had been lost in a computer failure. It was essentially a dog-ate-my-homework excuse or an inexcusable failure to properly store data.

Still, those headlines got so much attention that they set back the cause of reducing sodium for years.

Q: Any chance that the science war will end?
A: In 2019, the National Academy of Medicine may have put the matter to rest. An expert panel combined the results of several randomized controlled trials on sodium and cardiovascular disease. And the experts found a lower risk in people who ate less sodium.

I haven’t seen much argument since that report was published.

THE INDUSTRY WAR

Q: What about the second salt war?
A: The processed-food and restaurant industries have fought for decades to continue using as much salt as always, just as industry fought for years to keep using trans fat until it was banned.

Q: And the government?
A: In response to four decades of countless preventable deaths and government inaction, in 2010, a report by the Institute of Medicine, which is now the National Academy of Medicine, urged the Food and Drug Administration to set mandatory limits on the sodium content of different food categories—potato chips, canned soups, pizza, and so on—and to gradually lower those limits over time.

So in 2016, the FDA proposed sodium targets for both packaged and restaurant foods, though they were only voluntary.

Q: Did the industry object?
A: At first, The Grocery Manufacturers Association, which was the most influential food industry trade group, said yes, it could be useful for Americans to lower sodium, but then came up with 100 reasons why it wouldn’t work.

Salt Savings

You’d never know that some foods have less sodium without checking the Nutrition Facts label. One clue: Foods labeled “healthy” often have less. Even restaurant foods in our “Lower” column are loaded with sodium.
why sodium should not be lowered. The Salt Institute, the association of manufacturers like Morton Salt, just urged the FDA to abandon the targets.

Q: And now?
A: In the last few years, several major companies—like Unilever, Nestlé, and Mars—have declared their support for the FDA’s voluntary targets. The Grocery Manufacturers Association lost several major food companies and morphed into the Consumer Brands Association. And, thankfully, the Salt Institute has gone out of business. So the political landscape has changed dramatically.

However, here we are four years later, and the FDA has not done a darn thing to finalize the targets.

Q: How do we know that companies can cut sodium?
A: If you compare different brands of almost any food—salad dressings, breads, packaged meats, pasta sauces—you’ll find wide disparities in sodium content. [See “Salt Savings,” p. 5.]

That proves that many companies could lower the sodium levels to match the best performers in each category.

Also, some foods sold at McDonald’s, Burger King, and other chain restaurants in other countries have less salt than the same foods sold here.

Q: Why?
A: Many countries have made more progress than we have. The United Kingdom led the way. About 15 years ago, it set voluntary sodium targets, pressured food manufacturers to lower sodium, and mounted a campaign urging people to eat less salt.

After five years, sodium intakes fell by around 10 percent, which was about a quarter of the program’s goal. But when there was a change in government, progress came to a halt.

Q: Are there other approaches?
A: Yes. Chile, Israel, Uruguay, and other countries have been very effective with food labeling. Foods with more than specified levels of sodium have “high in salt” warnings on the front of the package. Similar symbols highlight foods high in saturated fat or sugar. A food could have two or three warning symbols.

After a couple of years, Chile lowered its threshold for a sodium symbol, and then dropped the threshold even further. That’s what we need to do here.

Q: After 40 years of fighting the salt wars, where do we stand?
A: If we go back 40 years, when you and I wrote a petition asking the FDA to require food labels to disclose sodium, we had support from many scientists and expert committees that said that Americans should eat less sodium.

But since then, increasingly sophisticated research has demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that we would benefit tremendously by eating lower-sodium diets.

Q: Yet the progress has been slow.
A: Yes. Despite the plethora of petitions, lawsuits, books, TV interviews, and meetings, the government and the food industry have failed to act. Americans are still consuming roughly 50 percent more sodium than experts recommend—and are suffering the consequences. The Industry War is essentially a stalemate.

**Eat a DASH Diet**

Here’s a 2,100-calorie version of the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet with fewer carbs than the original. It’s rich in fruits and vegetables and low in bad fats, added sugars, and salt. (Note: servings are small.)

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<td>1 serving: ½ cup pasta or rice or cereal or 1 slice bread</td>
<td>1 serving: 1 cup milk or yogurt or ½ oz. cheese</td>
<td>1 serving: ½ cup beans or ¼ cup nuts or 4 oz. tofu</td>
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Here’s how much your systolic pressure could fall with diet and exercise if you have high blood pressure. If you don’t, expect a drop of 2 to 4 points for each step.

### Lower Your Pressure

**Target**

- **Cut sodium to 2,300 mg a day**
  - ↓ 5–6 points

- **Get 3,500 to 5,000 mg a day of potassium**
  - ↓ 4–5 points

- **Eat a DASH diet**
  - ↓ 11 points

- **Limit alcohol**
  - ↓ 4 points

- **Exercise**
  - ↓ 5–8 points

- **Lose excess weight**
  - ↓ 5 points

**Tips**

- Read labels, buy lower-salt foods, use lite salt, eat fewer processed and restaurant foods.
- Fruits and vegetables have the most bang for your calorie buck.
- It may also cut your risk of type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and memory loss.
- If you drink, stop at 2 drinks a day for men (though 1 is better) and 1 drink a day for women.
- Aim for 90 to 150 minutes a week of aerobic and/or strength training.
- Expect about a 1-point drop for every 2 pounds you lose.

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

Plant vs. Animal Meats

Plant-based meats are processed foods, but they may still protect your heart. Researchers had 36 adults eat at least two servings a day of ordinary meats (like ground beef and sausage) for eight weeks and similar plant-based versions (supplied by Beyond Meat, which funded the study) for eight weeks.

LDL (“bad”) cholesterol was about 11 points lower, weight was 2 pounds lower, and TMAO (trimethylamine N-oxide) levels were about 40 percent lower when the participants ate the plant meats. TMAO, which is made by gut bacteria that dine on the carnitine in red meat, has been linked to a higher risk of heart disease.

What to do: Swap meats for plant-based meats that have less saturated fat (like the study did) to help your heart and cut greenhouse gas emissions.


Peppers & Parkinson’s?

Smokers have lower rates of Parkinson’s disease. That led researchers to wonder if the nicotine that occurs naturally in peppers could lower Parkinson’s risk, even though peppers have far less nicotine than tobacco.

The scientists tracked roughly 51,000 adults—none of whom had ever smoked—for 26 years.

Women who ate peppers (any kind) at least five times a week had roughly half the risk of Parkinson’s compared to women who ate them three times a month or less. The scientists saw no link between dietary nicotine and Parkinson’s in men.

What to do: It’s far too early to know if peppers can protect the brain. In the meantime, enjoy them.


Do the Kegel

One out of three women aged 60 or older experience urinary leakage. Researchers randomly assigned 319 women to 12 weeks of either individual or group pelvic floor muscle training. After a year, weekly episodes of leakage fell by 70 percent among those who got individual training and by 74 percent in those attending group sessions.

What to do: Do Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor. Go to pelvicfloorfirst.org.au to learn more.


Vitamin D & Vertigo

Vitamin D may help prevent benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV), which occurs when tiny crystals in the inner ear get dislodged.

Researchers randomly assigned 1,050 people who had been treated for BPPV—with a simple maneuver that moves the crystals back into place—to either an intervention or an observation group.

Of the 500 people in the intervention group, 348 had insufficient vitamin D levels (under 20 ng/mL) when they entered the study. Only they were given vitamin D (400 IU) and calcium carbonate (500 mg) twice a day.

After a year, the full intervention group had 24 percent fewer episodes of vertigo than the observation group. The researchers calculated that four people with insufficient vitamin D would need to take vitamin D and calcium for a year to prevent one case of BPPV.

What to do: If you’ve had BPPV, get your vitamin D tested to see if you need more.

Most people will feel the “burn” of heartburn at some point. But if you have gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, it’s more than an occasional discomfort. Do you need to avoid coffee? Hot wings? Chocolate? Would a special pillow help? Do drugs for GERD boost the risk of Covid-19? Here’s the scoop.

While most people think that reflux occurs because of an overproduction in stomach acid, it’s actually the contrary—it’s having low amounts of stomach acid that leads to this problem,” claims mercola.com.

How does low stomach acid cause reflux? Mercola doesn’t say.

“There’s no data to support that theory,” says Scott Gabbard, a gastroenterologist at the Cleveland Clinic. “Reflux isn’t an acid problem. It’s a valve problem.”

A valve called the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), to be precise. It’s the junction between your esophagus and your stomach.

“It’s a ring of muscle that’s supposed to open when you swallow and then close,” Gabbard explains.

“If that valve opens when it’s not supposed to, you’ve got an open conduit for stomach contents to come back up into the esophagus.”

That’s reflux. It happens to everyone occasionally. Most of us don’t even feel it.

“But if the reflux becomes troublesome with symptoms like frequent heartburn, sour taste in the mouth, or regurgitation, we call it gastroesophageal reflux disease,” says Carolyn Newberry, a gastroenterologist and assistant professor of medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College.

And that’s not rare. “Around 20 percent of American adults have GERD symptoms on a weekly basis,” says Joel Rubenstein, research scientist at the Veterans Affairs Center for Clinical Management Research and director of the Barrett’s Esophagus Program at the University of Michigan Medical School.

What causes the lower esophageal sphincter to relax?

Got GERD? Instead of avoiding a long list of “trigger” foods, try an elimination diet to see what causes your symptoms.

In some cases, drugs like beta-agonists for asthma, calcium channel blockers for blood pressure, and benzodiazepines for anxiety may be to blame.

“And having elevated weight can do it,” notes Gabbard.

“Excess fat increases pressure in the abdomen, and it may actually have some hormonal effects that cause the sphincter to relax.”

GERD Grief

“The vast majority of people who have GERD will not have any long-term consequences,” says Rubenstein. But regularly bathing the esophagus in corrosive stomach acid can lead to serious complications in some people.

“People can develop esophagitis, which is inflammation in the esophagus,” says Newberry. In some cases, that can lead to esophageal ulcers.

Over time, acid exposure can cause the cells that normally line the esophagus to be replaced with cells that resemble the acid-resistant cells of the intestine. That condition—Barrett’s esophagus—occurs in roughly 15 percent of people with GERD.

Barrett’s has no symptoms, and it can lead to a deadly cancer.

“People with Barrett’s have an estimated lifetime risk of esophageal adenocarcinoma of about 5 to 10 percent,” says Rubenstein.

“And the fatality rate for adenocarcinoma is very high.” Most patients live for less than a year.

“Many people aren’t diagnosed until that cancer is late stage,” notes Rubenstein. “Most patients with Barrett’s will not progress to cancer,” he adds. “But we do endoscopies to identify those who will. Those who are screened tend to be diagnosed with an earlier-stage cancer and have better survival.”

Trigger Warning

“There’s this thought that everybody with reflux needs to avoid coffee, chocolate, fatty foods, and all of the trigger foods on the lists that you find online,” says Gabbard.

The unverified advice is likely to do more harm than good, Rubenstein says. “I tell people to cut out a food category in that list of triggers for a week or two, then to reintroduce it. If the food bothers you, avoid it. If it doesn’t, it’s probably not a culprit for you.”

“Everyone is different,” Gabbard says. “And having elevated weight can do it.”

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What causes the lower esophageal sphincter to relax?
But there’s no good evidence that eliminating those foods extinguishes the flames of heartburn. “And it makes for a pretty bland diet and can give people anxiety about what they’re eating,” says Newberry.

Some spicy or acidic foods may irritate the esophagus, and others—like chocolate, mint, coffee, and alcohol—may relax the lower esophageal sphincter. Carbonated drinks can increase bloating, which could also cause the sphincter to relax. But no one has done randomized trials to see if avoiding those foods curbs heartburn.

A few small trials have tested high-fat meals. “Fatty foods don’t drain from the stomach as quickly, which may lead the stomach contents to back up and induce reflux,” says Newberry. In one study of 15 people with reflux, a meal with 600 calories and 20 grams of fat resulted in less acid in the esophagus and less heartburn than a meal with 1,100 calories and 65 grams of fat.

“Whether consuming less fat or lower-calorie meals works over the long term hasn’t been well studied,” says Gabbard.

Where does that leave someone with heartburn? “I don’t want to send the message that diet has no role in reflux, because it does for many people,” says Newberry. “But you need to figure out what your triggers are.”

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### Bye Bye, Burn

**What else helps?**

- **Lose excess weight.** By losing weight, particularly around the midsection, you’re decreasing the pressure in the abdominal cavity, which helps reduce reflux,” says Newberry.

  In a study on nearly 30,000 Norwegians with reflux, those who dropped the most weight were twice as likely to report a drop in reflux symptoms as those who dropped the least.

- **Eat earlier.** Not eating for a couple of hours before bedtime may help, though the evidence is limited.

  One study had 30 people with reflux eat a Big Mac, fries, and a soda either six hours or two hours before bedtime.

- **Elevate your torso.** “Nighttime reflux tends to come and go over time.

  "Lying on your left side at an incline positions the lower esophageal sphincter straight up,” says Gabbard. “So we studied a pillow that essentially locks patients in that proper position.” (See illustration, below.)

  “In an earlier study in people without GERD, sleeping in that position decreased acid in the esophagus by 87 percent compared to lying flat.” (The study was funded by the pillow maker.)

  In the more recent study, Gabbard instructed 25 patients with nighttime reflux to sleep on a special pillow (provided by the pillow maker) for at least 6 hours a night. After two weeks, “their score on a symptom scale improved by about 70 percent.”

  But that study had no control group, so people may have felt better because they expected to or because symptoms tend to come and go over time.

  Not ready to cough up $280 for a pillow? Try sleeping on your left side or on a bed wedge or setting the head of your bed frame on blocks.

### Dropping Acid

“Unfortunately, we don’t have any FDA-approved medications that work on the valve,” says Gabbard.

“Our medicines either neutralize acid or decrease acid production. So you still have things reflexing up. But if there’s less acid in it, it’s not damaging the esophagus.”

- **Antacids** like Tums, Alka-Seltzer, Mylanta, and Rolaids neutralize acid in the esophagus. They work quickly, but don’t last long, so they’re best for treating mild, occasional heartburn. (Alka-Seltzer tablets have roughly 600 to 1,200 milligrams of sodium per dose, so consider other antacids instead.)
Histamine-receptor antagonists (H2RAs) like Pepcid and Tagamet make the stomach produce less acid, and they last longer than antacids. H2RAs also work more quickly than proton pump inhibitors.

“But they can stop working after two weeks or less,” says Gabbard. “So they may be better for short-term use.”

In April, the Food and Drug Administration asked companies to stop selling the H2RA drug ranitidine (also known as Zantac), and advised consumers to throw out any unused ranitidine.2

Tests found that levels of a contaminant in ranitidine called NDMA increase over time and at higher-than-room temperatures. NDMA is thought to be a human carcinogen.

But if you’ve been taking ranitidine, don’t panic.

“A study presented at a conference this year looked at health records from 65 million patients,” says Gabbard. “It found no link between ranitidine use and cancer compared with people who took another H2RA.” Though the study hasn’t been published yet, its results are reassuring.

Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) like Prilosec, Prevacid, and Nexium are the most potent acid blockers on the market. They not only treat symptoms like heartburn and regurgitation but also decreased stomach acid may predispose us to infections and other possible “confounders,” but they can’t eliminate them all.

“So you may conclude that PPIs cause, say, kidney disease when something else is responsible,” says Rubenstein.22 “The way to fix that problem is with a randomized controlled trial.”

In a recent trial, researchers randomly assigned roughly 17,500 people to take a PPI or a placebo every day. After three years, the PPI takers were no more likely to have obesity, and so on.”

Researchers try to control for weight and other possible “confounders,” but they can’t eliminate them all.

“The main reason we have acid in our stomach is to kill the microorganisms that we ingest,” Rubenstein explains. “So decreased stomach acid may predispose a person to contract a GI infection.”

Could that explain the results of an online survey of roughly 53,000 Americans who reported having symptoms like abdominal pain, heartburn, or regurgitation?

“The problem is that those studies were observational, so it can’t prove that PPIs increase your risk of getting Covid-19,” he cautions. And with an online survey, researchers can’t confirm what people report.

While Rubenstein isn’t ignoring the results, “I don’t think they’re a reason for people to just stop taking their PPIs. It’s only one study.”

Covid-19 or not, “patients should make sure that they have a good reason for taking a PPI,” says Rubenstein.

“They are wonderfully effective drugs, especially for people with Barrett’s esophagus. But they are overused. If you don’t have Barrett’s, you can try stopping the PPI or using an H2 blocker, which is less potent. If your symptoms go away, you don’t need to be on the PPI.”

14 Am. J. Gastroenterol. in press.
Those at most risk for the most serious outcomes of Covid-19, including hospitalization and death, are people afflicted by diet-related chronic diseases (obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease),” wrote the experts advising the government on the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

And that includes many of us, judging by our weight, blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol. Here’s a snapshot of the nation’s health.

BY BONNIE LIEBMAN

High blood pressure

46% of adults

Among people 65 and older, 78% have high blood pressure.


High LDL cholesterol

29% of adults

“High” means at least 130 milligrams per deciliter.


Diabetes & prediabetes

Among people 65 and older, 47% have prediabetes and 27% have diabetes (mostly type 2).

Source: cdc.gov/diabetes/data/statistics/statistics-report.html

Excess weight

CHILDREN
Normal-weight adults are a minority.

ADULTS

53%
61%
17%
3%
26%
32%

3% under-weight
61% normal weight
17% overweight
2% under-weight
19% obesity
40% overweight
40% obesity

Women 50+ years

Healthy bones
Low bone mass
Osteoporosis

30%
53%
17%

Men 50+ years

Healthy bones
Low bone mass
Osteoporosis

59%
36%
5%

Low bone mass
Osteoporosis

30%
53%
17%

59%
36%
5%

Reduced muscle strength

11% of adults 60–79 years

49% of adults 80+ years

Experts use hand-grip strength as an indicator of muscle strength.

Source: dietaryguidelines.gov/2020-advisory-committee-report/data-analysis
**Beet Salad with Mustard Vinaigrette**

1 Tbs. whole-grain mustard
1 small shallot, thinly sliced
1 Tbs. red wine vinegar
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 tsp. orange zest
¼ tsp. kosher salt
1 lb. cooked red and/or yellow beets, cut into wedges
2 cups salad greens
½ cup cooked wheat berries or farro

1. Make the dressing: In a medium bowl, whisk together the mustard, shallot, vinegar, oil, orange zest, and salt.
2. Arrange the beets and salad greens on a platter or salad plates.
3. Sprinkle with the wheat berries.
4. Spoon the dressing over the salad.

**PER SERVING (1 cup):**
calories 140 | total fat 7 g | sat fat 1 g | carbs 18 g | fiber 3 g | total sugar 10 g | added sugar 0 g | protein 3 g | sodium 290 mg
Nuts get lots of attention...and they deserve it. Healthy fats. Vitamins & minerals. A little plant protein. And talk about taste! The hard part: stopping after a serving.

Here’s our guide to enjoying the best nuts (and seeds). Turn the page for more tips, plus our Best Bites and Honorable Mentions.

1 Help your heart. The good news: When you add most nuts to your diet, it helps reduce LDL cholesterol. That should lower your risk of heart disease.

Your best bets are walnuts, pecans, almonds, peanuts, pistachios, hazelnuts, and most seeds, rather than macadamias, cashews, or Brazil nuts (see “Have a Heart”).

2 Mix it up. While almonds are nutrient rich, they’re also heavily advertised. In fact, a cornucopia of nuts and seeds beat almonds for nutrients like calcium (sesame seeds), folate (peanuts), protein (pumpkin seeds), vitamin E (sunflower seeds), fiber (chia seeds), and magnesium (hemp seeds). So play the field.

3 Keep track. Nuts pack plenty of calories into a tiny bundle (see “Counting Calories,” p. 14). Turn the page for our guide to counting out a 1 oz. serving. Or use a ¼ cup measure or inexpen-
sive kitchen scale. Shell-
ing your own nuts (like pistachios) may also slow you down.

4 Mind the sodium (it’s easy). Salted nuts may have less sodium than you’d expect, since it’s just sprinkled on top. But if you’re watching every milligram, varieties that are unsalted (our Best Bites) or “lightly salted” (many Honorable Mentions) abound.

Tip: An ounce of some sunflower seed shells are dusted with a full day’s worth of sodium. Shell them in your hands, not in your mouth. Or buy them shelled.

5 Don’t glaze over. Our Honor-
able Mentions have no more than 3 grams (about ½ teaspoon) of added sugars per ounce. That keeps you in honey-roasted or cocoa-dusted territory. Glazed nuts can hit 2 or more teaspoons.

6 Watch clusters, coatings, and “snack” or “breakfast” mixes.

Some of them sully nuts’ good name. Take Planters’s line of Breakfast Blends. The Cinnamon Roll, for example, is anything but “part of a balanced break-
fast.” It’s sugary peanuts and almonds plus palm-oil-coated “yogurt” blueberries and mini cookies. So each ounce delivers 3 teaspoons of added sugars—but only 3 grams of protein.

7 Handle with care.

Thanks to all those unsaturated fats, nuts and seeds don’t stay fresh forever. Freeze in a zipper bag or airtight container to extend their life.

And to really bring out their flavor, toast them in the oven at 325°F for 5 to 10 minutes. Just watch them closely. Nuts seem to go from untoasted to burnt in seconds.
What’s a Serving?

Here’s the typical number of nuts in a 1 oz. serving. An ounce of sunflower kernels or shelled pumpkin seeds (not shown) is about ¼ cup, or roughly 4 level tablespoons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nuts</th>
<th>Number of Nuts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almonds</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil Nuts</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashews</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazelnuts</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macadamias</td>
<td>10–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanuts</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pecans</td>
<td>19 halves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pistachios</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walnuts</td>
<td>14 halves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: International Tree Nut Council Nutrition Research & Education Foundation, USDA FoodData Central.

Counting Calories

“KIND nut bars have nearly 20% less calories,” the company announced in January. Yet the list of ingredients hadn’t changed.

The new numbers came from studies led by David Baer, supervisory research physiologist at the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Beltsville, Maryland. (Those studies were partly funded by the nut industry.) Baer’s team measured how many calories people digested and absorbed from different nuts versus how many calories went out in their, um, waste.

In two studies, whole almonds averaged 19 to 25 percent fewer calories than what’s listed on most Nutrition Facts labels and in our chart on p. 15. That works out to about 30 to 40 fewer calories per ounce.1,2

Why? Nuts aren’t just hard to crack; they’re also hard to chew.

“The more you chew, the more you’re grinding up the plant cell walls and making the nutrients inside available for digestion,” says Baer. That also explains why the calories in almond butter were no lower.2 In a sense, it’s already been chewed for you.

Baer got similar results for walnut pieces (21 percent fewer calories) and cashews (16 percent), though not pistachios (5 percent). But those numbers are averages. Some volunteers—presumably champion chewers—absorbed no fewer calories. How well do you chew? Who knows.

Does the same go for other plants, like seeds or beans or corn? No one has looked. Baer is now testing lentils and chickpeas.

But even slimmed-down nuts are still high in calories per bite. Use our “What’s a Serving?” pictures to track your bites.

Go Nuts (and Seeds)

Don’t add nuts and seeds to your diet. Use them to replace calories from less-healthy foods.

■ Lose the white-flour croutons. Nuts (like walnuts, pecans, and hazelnuts) and seeds are crunchier and more flavorful anyway.

■ Amandine, anyone? Instead of breading, try chopped or sliced toasted almonds or pecans on top of chicken, fish, or green beans.

■ Do better than bars. Even the best dried fruit & nut bars (like some of KIND’s) have about a teaspoon of added sugars. Why not pour an ounce of nuts and a few bites of dried fruit (try raisins, figs, or unsweetened mango) into a reusable container instead?

■ Bye bye, bacon. Smoked almonds have more sodium than regular almonds, but they deliver the smoky flavor of bacon. Add them to salads, veggies, etc.

■ Go beyond granola. Old take on a parfait: sugary yogurt plus sugary granola. New take: plain yogurt plus toasted nuts (and fruit).

■ Swap sugary cereal. Add nuts and berries to sugar-free shredded wheat or oatmeal.
In a Nutshell

Best Bites (✓) have no added salt or sugar. Honorable Mentions (†) can have up to 80 milligrams of sodium and 3 grams (about ⅛ tsp.) of added sugars per serving. Both are free of mix-ins like cookie pieces and pretzels. We disqualified cashews, macadamias, and Brazil nuts, but not mixed nuts that contain just some of those. Nuts and seeds are ranked from least to most sodium, then to least to protein, then to least to calories. Sweet nuts, seeds, mixes, and clusters are first ranked from least to most added sugars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nuts</th>
<th>Calories</th>
<th>Sodium (mg)</th>
<th>Protein (g)</th>
<th>Added Sugars (tsp.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Almonds (1 oz., about 23 nuts)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Unsalted, any brand</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Diamond Lightly Salted</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good &amp; Gather (Target) Lightly Salted Roasted</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trader Joe’s 50% Less Salt</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Diamond Roasted Salted</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue Diamond Gourmet†</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue Diamond Smokehouse</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peanuts (1 oz., about 40 nuts)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>✓ Unsalted, any brand</td>
<td>160</td>
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<td>60</td>
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<td>Good &amp; Gather (Target) Lightly Salted Dry Roasted</td>
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<td>Planters Lightly Salted Dry Roasted</td>
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<td>Planters Classic</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planters Dry Roasted</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td><strong>Miscellaneous Nuts (nuts in 1 oz., about ¾ cup)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Pistachios, unsalted, any brand (49)</td>
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<td>Hazelnuts (filberts), unsalted, any brand (21)</td>
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<td>Brazil nuts, unsalted, any brand (6)</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Walnuts, unsalted, any brand (¼–⅛ cup)</td>
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<td>Pecans, unsalted, any brand (19 halves)</td>
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<td>Macadamias, unsalted, any brand (10–12)</td>
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<td>Planters Deluxe Lightly Salted Whole Cashews</td>
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<td><strong>Mixed Nuts (1 oz., about ¾ cup)</strong></td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good &amp; Gather (Target) Raw</td>
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<td>365 (Whole Foods) Roasted &amp; Unsalted Deluxe</td>
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<tr>
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<td>170</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planters NUT-rition Raw</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good &amp; Gather (Target) Lightly Salted Roasted</td>
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<td>Planters Deluxe Lightly Salted</td>
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<td>Planters NUT-rition Essential Nutrients Mix</td>
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<tr>
<td>365 (Whole Foods) Roasted &amp; Lightly Salted</td>
<td>170</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planters Lightly Salted</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Planters Select Cashews, Almonds &amp; Pecans</td>
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<td>Good &amp; Gather (Target) Sea Salt Roasted</td>
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<td>110</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seeds (1 oz. shelled or hulled, 3–4 Tbs.)</th>
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<th>Sodium (mg)</th>
<th>Protein (g)</th>
<th>Added Sugars (tsp.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hemp or pumpkin seeds, unsalted, any brand</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Sunflower seeds, unsalted, any brand</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cha seeds, unsalted, any brand</td>
<td>140</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sesame seeds, unsalted, any brand</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trader Joe’s Roasted &amp; Salted Pumpkin Seeds</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>365 (Whole Foods) Organic Roasted &amp; Salted Sunflower Kernels</td>
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<td>110</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Sea Salt Pumpkin Pepitas</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Sunflower Kernels</td>
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<td>220</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Jumbo Reduced Sodium Sunflower Seeds</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>2,070†</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Jumbo Original Sunflower Seeds</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>2,820†</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Jumbo Buffalo Style Ranch Sunflower Seeds</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>3,280†</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sweet Nuts &amp; Seeds (1 oz., about ¾ cup, unless noted)</th>
<th>Calories</th>
<th>Sodium (mg)</th>
<th>Protein (g)</th>
<th>Added Sugars (tsp.)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Diamond Oven Roasted Dark Chocolate</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Diamond Toasted Coconut Almonds</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emerald Cocoa Roast Almonds (3 Tbs.)</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wonderful Honey Roasted Pistachios</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5*</td>
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<tr>
<td>365 (Whole Foods) Honey Roasted Peanuts</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Diamond Oven Roasted Blueberry</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planters Cocoa Peanuts</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Planters Salted Caramel Peanuts</td>
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<td>95</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planters Honey Roasted Mixed Nuts</td>
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<td>115</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emerald Honey Glazed Almonds (3 Tbs.)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerald Glazed Walnuts (3 Tbs.)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mixes &amp; Clusters (1 oz., ½–1½ cup, unless noted)</th>
<th>Calories</th>
<th>Sodium (mg)</th>
<th>Protein (g)</th>
<th>Added Sugars (tsp.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Energy Packed Mix Sea Salt</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahale Bean + Nut Snack Mix†</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerald 100 Calorie Natural Walnuts &amp; Almonds with Dried Cherries (1 pouch, 0.7 oz.)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerald 100 Calorie Cashews &amp; Almonds with Dried Pineapple (1 pouch, 0.7 oz.)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerald 100 Calorie Cashews &amp; Almonds with Dried Cranberries (1 pouch, 0.7 oz.)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIND Clusters Nuts &amp; Seeds Almond Cashew Sunflower</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIND Clusters Nuts &amp; Seeds Almond Pumpkin Chia</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIND Nut Clusters Peanut Butter Dark Chocolate</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahale Honey Almonds Glazed Mix</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIND Clusters Nuts &amp; Fruit Almond Cranberry &amp; Cacao</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nature Valley Snack Mix (1 pouch, 1.2 oz.)†</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planters Breakfast Blends Cinnamon Roll</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
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Best Bites: † Honorable Mention. † Average of the entire line. † Includes salt on the shells. * Estimate.

Daily Protein Target: 85 grams. Daily Values (for a 2,000-calorie diet): Sodium: 2,300 milligrams. Added Sugars: 50 grams (12 tsp.). To convert tsp. of added sugars to grams, multiply by 4.2.

Source: company information. The use of information from this article for commercial purposes is strictly prohibited without written permission from CSPI.
Want to mix up your salad? Lettuce help.

Supermarkets are awash in baby kale, baby spinach, baby arugula, and other young ‘uns.

When you don’t want the robust taste of darker greens, try a mellow baby butter lettuce blend. The butter babies are as sweet as the grown-ups.

Like just about any greens, they offer fiber, vitamins A and K, and folate for next to no calories (just 20 or so in two cups).

**Fresh Express** blends green butter lettuce with the iron-rich red variety, which gives its Sweet & Crunchy salad a pop of color. Ditto for **Organicgirl Butter, Plus**!

Baby spinach fan? It’s in butter blends like **Fresh Express Tender Ruby Reds and Earth-bound Farm Organic Spinach + Butter**.

Any of them would make a dynamite salad...our Dish of the Month, for example.

And don’t forget full-sized heads of butter lettuce (often called Boston or Bibb). Their perfectly sized round leaves are ideal for sandwiches or lettuce cups.

For a satisfying crunch, try **Little Gems**. They’re like personal heads of romaine. If you buy them at a farmers market, there’s no plastic packaging.

**Organicgirl** sells Little Gem leaves year-round in supermarkets. “The best of both worlds,” says the website. “Sweet like butter and crunchy like romaine.”

Talk about a sweet deal.

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**Breaking Bad**

“Chock full of thick, juicy cuts of smoked and pork sausages, our **Double Sausage & Bacon Loaded Tots** mixes crispy bacon, golden tater tots, fluffy scrambled eggs, and decadent queso cheese sauce,” says the box of **Devour All Day Breakfast**.

“So whether it’s dawn or dusk, these tasty tots are tricked out with all the meats for whenever your breakfast craving hits.”

That’s right. Dawn, dusk, or anytime in between, breakfast is waiting! Who needs fresh fruit, whole grains, nuts, or low-fat dairy when you can reach into the freezer for a tray of roughly 50 ingredients, including two cancer-causing processed meats, pasteurized process cheese, cornstarch, disodium dihydrogen pyrophosphate, sodium acid sulfate, modified cornstarch, xanthan gum, corn syrup solids, sodium phosphates, and sodium nitrite?

It’s only a 9 oz. package, but Kraft Heinz manages to pack in 430 calories and more than half a day’s sat fat (12 grams) and sodium (1,280 mg). Nice going!

Want another meat-and-potatoes (or white-flour) extravaganza? Try Devour’s **Biscuits, Bacon & Creamy Sausage Gravy**, **Spicy Chorizo Queso Hash**, or **Steak N’ Eggs with Creamy Gravy**.

“All food should be mouth-watering,” says the box. “Period. End of story.”

Um, don’t be so sure.

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**Pear & Hazelnut Salad**

Whisk 1 Tbs. white balsamic vinegar with 2 Tbs. low-fat sour cream, 2 Tbs. mayo, 1 Tbs. dill, 1 Tbs. chives, and ¼ tsp. kosher salt. Spoon over 8 cups lettuce, 1 sliced pear, and ¼ cup hazelnuts. Serves 4.