

Eat this, not that

Healthy living isn't as complicated as you think. With a few smart tweaks in your diet, you can achieve great rewards. We've rounded up some experts to show the way.

BY RIEKIE HUMAN



WHEN IT COMES TO clever food choices, you needn't starve yourself or forfeit great-tasting treats to be healthy. According to Celynn Erasmus, a registered dietitian and professional speaker on health issues, there are many examples of simple changes that can have considerable benefits. For example, did you know that one regular milkshake contains a whole bowl of ice cream? "Ice cream is high in unhealthy saturated fats and sugar," says Erasmus, pointing out that a smoothie (see "Guilt-free treats" sidebar) would be a better choice.

Often, a food's Glycemic Index (GI) rating is the key to determining whether something is a sound choice or not. "GI is a physiological measure of how fast a carbohydrate food affects your blood-glucose levels. Low-GI foods help to improve the blood lipid profile, insulin levels and help to increase satiety levels," explains Claudia Lilje, a registered dietitian from Pretoria.

APPETISING ALTERNATIVES

> **Eat this:** Sweet potato

> **Not that:** Regular potato

"Sweet potatoes are higher in soluble fibre, which promotes good colon health. They're also slower releasing than regular potatoes and may keep you fuller for longer," says Erasmus. In other words, potatoes are high GI – and cause a rapid increase in blood-glucose levels, while sweet potatoes are low GI – releasing glucose and energy steadily over a period of time, adds Lilje.

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GUILT-FREE TREATS

▲ **Java** Opt for an Americano or filter coffee rather than a flavoured latte, advises Erasmus. "Flavoured lattes contain concentrated syrups and often total more than 1000 kilojoules. A regular filter coffee with a little milk and no more than two teaspoons of sugar is a better choice for managing your weight, as it's lower in kilojoules."

▲ **Top tittle** When you're out and about and deciding which cocktail to order, have a close look at the ingredients, says Lilje. "It's best to avoid soft-drink mixes and cream-blended cocktails." Also, many fruit juices are made by adding sugar, so it's best to avoid these too. "A healthier option is a Bloody Mary. The tomato juice has less sugar than other fruit juices, and it contains lycopene – which has been shown to protect against certain cancers and heart disease."

▲ **Smooth moves** Always go for smoothies rather than milkshakes, says Erasmus. "Smoothies are higher in nutrients because of the whole fresh fruit is used. This provides more vitamins, minerals and fibre."



> **Eat this:** Wholegrain bread

> **Not that:** White bread

"High-fibre food takes longer to ingest than the same quantity of refined food. That way, your body's satiation mechanism kicks in before you eat too much energy (food). So a diet high in fibre can promote weight loss," advises

Lilje. “Wholegrain bread contains both soluble and insoluble fibre, which help to lower blood cholesterol and glucose levels, as well as ensures healthy bowel movements,” she says. “On the other hand, white bread is a refined starch and contains less fibre.” What’s more, Erasmus points out that wholegrain and seed-loaf breads have a lower GI – which means it’ll stabilise your blood-glucose levels, and lessen cravings.

➤ **Eat this:** Avocado
➤ **Not that:** Butter and animal fats

Avos are an excellent source of healthy monounsaturated fats, vitamin E and potassium.

Monounsaturated fats keep your heart healthy and may help with lowering cholesterol levels. “Monounsaturated fats, polyunsaturated fats and plant sterols/stanols are all good fats,” says Lilje, “and some of them also provide the omega-3 fatty acids – a powerful anti-inflammatory.” So-called bad fats are mostly animal fats, which include saturated and trans fats. “They increase cholesterol levels and your risk for heart disease,” she says.

➤ **Eat this:** Fatty fish such as salmon

➤ **Not that:** Red meat

“Fatty fish rich in omega-3s lowers your risk of heart disease and high blood pressure. Aim to eat a 120g portion of fatty fish (salmon, tuna, herring, pilchards or sardines) at least three times per week,” advises Erasmus. “Red meat contains saturated fats, which will push up your cholesterol levels.”

➤ **Eat this:** Unsalted low fat popcorn



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➤ **Not that:** Chips

Popcorn is higher in fibre and lower in fat than chips, especially if a little oil is used in its preparation. And, says Erasmus, if little or no salt is added, popcorn is lower in sodium than chips too. “This makes it a healthier, lower-kilojoule snack and more suitable for those who have high blood pressure. Even though the label may say chips are free of trans-fatty acids, they’re still very high in fat and sodium,” says Erasmus.

➤ **Eat this:** Potato wedges

➤ **Not that:** Fries

When you’re eating out, potato wedges are a better option than fries – provided that the wedges are thick cut, says Lilje. “The thick cut limits the amount of oil which is absorbed during the frying process. Keep in mind though that oven-baked chips or a baked potatoes contain significantly less fat and kilojoules than either fries or wedges,” she says.

➤ **Eat this:** Rolled oats or Swiss muesli

➤ **Not that:** Instant oats, granola or sweetened muesli

According to Erasmus, rolled oats is a healthier choice as it’s higher in soluble fibre, lower in sugar and therefore lower in overall kilojoules. It’ll keep you fuller for longer and help you to manage your weight. “Sweetened mueslis are concentrated carbohydrates and possibly also higher in fat than Swiss or dry muesli,” says Erasmus.

With these tips in mind, you can easily ring in the changes for not just your health, but also your family. And don’t forget the goodness locked up in



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Spice things up!

Use spices such as garlic and ginger rather than salt. They don’t only add flavour but pack a powerful nutritional punch too. “They also help to reduce the need for seasoning food with salt, which contains sodium and increases blood pressure,” says Erasmus.



fruit and nuts! “Both nuts and dried fruit are good options for snacking, if compared to chocolate and chips,” says Lilje. But even here, you need to apply some savvy choices. Non-salted nuts are preferred to dried fruit since they contain heart-healthy monounsaturated fat, vitamin E, fibre and protein, says Lilje. And when it comes to fruit, says Erasmus, “one fresh fruit yields about 100ml of fruit juice, so a large glass of juice can be equivalent to four or more whole fresh fruit! Fruit juices are concentrated liquid fruit, without the fibre, so it’s best to eat fresh fruit and to drink water to quench your thirst,” she concludes. ▴