

21 CHEAT FOODS

A HEALTHY WAY TO SNACK



You've been fighting the battle of the bulge for what feels like ages. Each time the journey takes the same road – you start out feeling the thrill of the fight. You've chosen a new diet supplement, exercise program or diet plan and this time – unlike the other times you've tried to lose weight – you are going to stick with the diet. Things go well for the first few days or weeks on the new diet, but then hunger takes over and you start thinking about all the foods you'd like to be eating instead of the foods you are eating.

Hunger is the driving force that causes the majority of diets to fail, but the hunger you're fighting is not necessarily physical. You hunger for foods you love; foods you desire. There's a good chance your current eating habits, dietary supplement program or exercise program will lead you to weight loss success, but first you need to jump over that hunger hurdle; or rather,

crash through the hunger hurdle with healthy snacks that feel like you're cheating.

The Art of Eating to Lose Weight is Something You Mold to Real Life

There is an abundance of information on healthy snacks, healthy meals and healthy eating habits that make it easier to lose weight – but there's more to dieting successfully than following a plan every day for the next year, ten years or a lifetime. Dieting in the real world is plagued with hunger, cravings and a desire for comfort foods, junk foods and snack foods not typically suggested for dieters trying to lose weight. Herein is the problem with strict dieting. If you stick with a strict eating plan for a long period of time you are bound to feel deprived and that's when you don't just fall off the wagon, you jump off the wagon, run to the nearest fast food restaurant

and counteract every moment of healthy eating with weeks of binging on the same foods that helped you gain weight in the first place.

Successful dieters take life by the horns. They accept the fact that dieting is about consistency not deprivation. We'd like to help you move past that dieting hurdle and down a new path; a path of weight loss success that ends with you feeling healthier, happier and accomplished by making healthy food choices you can follow long-term. These healthy choices include eating "cheat" foods that you never thought you'd be allowed to eat again.

Snacks – It's What's in Between Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Snacks are extremely important for the dieter, especially after the first few weeks of dieting when that feeling of deprivation starts. Maybe you notice your child eating a bowl of potato

chips and you suddenly feel like you deserve to reward yourself for being so dedicated to weight loss. Maybe you have been eating the same foods from a prescribed list of acceptable snacks for so long your taste buds want a change of pace; whatever the reason for desiring a “cheat” snack you can have your “cheat” and lose weight too.

10 Snacks You Should Never Live Without While Dieting

We'll hit the snack topic first because snacks can make or break your weight loss success. Often, dieters do an excellent job of sticking to the suggested calorie intake or suggested meal plan associated with a weight loss diet, but snacks pose a problem. Between those low-calorie or low-fat meals comes nagging hunger. Snacks can supply more calories than an entire meal if dieters aren't careful, but who wants to chow

down on rice cakes that supply no nutritional value and taste like cardboard? Now you don't have to.

Trail Mix

There's nothing more nutritious and filling than a good handful of trail mix, but commercially prepared trail mix is packed with tons of fat and calories. You need to stay within reason when choosing a trail mix, but you also need to fulfill that need to "cheat" on your diet. If you must choose commercial trail mix, choose a trail mix that offers the lowest number of calories for the largest serving. Just one cup of commercial trail mix can pack up to 700 calories – far too much for your weight loss diet. To limit calorie intake, shop around for prepackaged servings of trail mix. There is no estimated portion size and no large bag to stick your hand in every time you want a little "cheat" snack.

A healthier option is to create your own healthy trail mix. Choose a low-calorie cereal as the base. Mix in a couple tablespoons of miniature marshmallows, almonds and dark chocolate chips. The end result will be a fantastic “cheat” snack for less than half the calories of commercial trail mix.

Guacamole Salsa and Tortilla Chips

What better way to cheat on a diet than with tortilla chips and guacamole. Baked tortilla chips are a healthier option than fried tortilla chips, so shop around for a baked brand and compare calories, fat and other nutritional values between brands before making your final selection. The price of baked tortilla chips may be slightly higher than fried tortilla chips, but you are eating a smaller portion now so the bag will last longer.

As for guacamole – avocado is packed with tons of nutritious vitamins, healthy fat and fiber, but commercial guacamole is also packed with ingredients that drive the calorie count well above healthy levels. Buy your own avocado, tomato, onion, garlic and lime to create a fresh, nutritious guacamole salsa to create the perfect “cheat” food.

Cream Cheese Spread and Crackers

There’s nothing better than cheese as a “cheat” food while dieting, but choosing the right cheese is crucial to keeping your calorie count down and your hunger at bay. Whipped cream cheese or Neufchatel supply fewer calories than full-fat cream cheese. Whipped cream cheese is also easier to spread and combine with other ingredients, making it ideal for this healthy “cheat” snack.

Mix a few tablespoons of your favorite spices into the entire container of cream cheese. Think dehydrated onions for a French onion taste or garlic and herbs for a Mediterranean option. If you want to create multiple cream cheese spreads, divide the container of cream cheese into smaller storage containers and get creative.

Measure out one serving of multi-grain or whole-grain crackers onto a small plate and spoon one to two tablespoons of your cream cheese spread on the side. Use a small butter knife to spread the cream cheese spread on each cracker.

“Cheating” is not just about eating the foods you love; it is about enjoying foods that taste great.

Nuts

Choosing nuts as a healthy snack is a slippery slope, but one you can navigate with ease once you learn a few things about nutrition. Nuts are packed with fiber, protein and healthy fats, but it

is those fats that drive the calorie count per 100-gram serving through the roof.

Chestnuts are the healthiest “cheat” nut on the planet. A single 100-gram serving of chestnuts supplies less than 200 calories and only one gram of fat. Coconut meat is next on the list supplying about 350 calories and 33 grams of fat per 100-gram serving. Rounding out the top three best diet nuts are cashews supplying about 550 calories and 44 grams of fat per 100-gram serving.

You may be thinking about a couple of things right now. First, how much is 100 grams of nuts and second, how is consuming 550 calories considered healthy? Let’s tackle the 100 gram question first. Weight and cup measurements are tricky as water content, nut size and other variables come into play. If you don’t have a food scale in your home, you can estimate 100 grams as about one cup of nuts.

Now, what about that 550 calorie “cheat” snack? Like we said before, dieting is a careful balance of strict food control with intermittent times when you allow yourself a treat that we like to call a “cheat”. You are much better off nutritionally consuming 550 calories from a cup of healthy nuts than 550 calories from a fat-laden, fried, processed hamburger from your local fast food spot. Changing how you think about food means changing your idea that all calories are created equal. You want to get the most for your calorie buck and in terms of “cheat” foods; nuts are on the top of the list.

Baked Potato Chips

Probably one of the most important creations in the dieting market was the baked potato chip. Potato chips are traditionally deep fried. If you question this concept, grab a paper towel and lay a single “normal” chip on top. You will see the oil

being pulled out of the potato chip right before your eyes.

Baked potato chips offer the same crunch and salty taste as the fried counterpart without the added fat. That's not to say baked potato chips supply fewer calories, but you can consume more baked potato chips per serving for the same caloric impact, in most cases. Check out a few brands and go to town on a healthy serving of one of America's favorite snack foods without feeling like you've ruined your diet. For added flavor, try dipping your baked potato chips in a fresh, salsa of tomato, lime and cilantro.

Popcorn

You've probably read that popcorn is a healthy, low-calorie snack a million times before, but not the way we suggest you eat it. Popcorn is a rather dull food, but a single three-cup serving supplies less than 100 calories, nearly four grams

of fiber and more than three grams of protein when air-popped. Popcorn is actually an extremely healthy food, but you want to “cheat” so let’s transform that boring popcorn into a delicacy.

Throw three cups of air-popped popcorn onto a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper. In a separate bowl, melt two tablespoons of dark chocolate chips in the microwave. Drizzle the melted chocolate over the popcorn and sprinkle with salt. Allow the chocolate to cool before enjoying this amazing “cheat” snack that contains less than 300 calories, about five grams of fiber and about five grams of protein.

Cereal

For some reason, cereal is the perfect “cheat” food. Many dieters attempt to keep only healthy, higher-fiber cereals in the house when dieting, but that is the worst choice you could make.

High-fiber, diet cereals tend to have more calories per cup than sugar-laden cereals and most cereals are available in whole grain varieties and enriched with vitamins, so healthy is all about perception. When you want to “cheat” you don’t want woody tasting sticks of fiber – you want sugar and that’s exactly what you should eat, but the kicker is in the milk.

Whole milk is packed with calories and skim milk tastes like water. Skim milk tends to contain more calories than unsweetened almond milk, soy milk or coconut milk, so shop around for an alternative to cow’s milk to turn an unhealthy snack into the perfect “cheat” snack.

For the sake of description, Fruity Pebbles by Post contains about 100 calories per serving. The majority of those 100 calories come from carbohydrates, but only 48 come directly from sugars (check that meal replacement bar you ate yesterday and you’ll likely find just as much

sugar). Combine those 100 calories with calcium-rich, high-protein almond milk and your “cheat” snack that takes you back to being a kid again instantly transforms into a healthy snack.

Hummus and Crackers

Sometimes you want a sugary “cheat” snack and other times you want a savory snack. Hummus is an excellent source of fiber, but commercially prepared hummus also contains tahini or sesame butter. Tahini packs a whopping 85 calories per tablespoon with the majority of those calories coming from fat. You can make your own healthy hummus at home and eat twice the amount suggested on the commercial package for fewer calories.

Throw one cup of chick peas into your food processor with three to four cloves of roasted garlic and juice of two limes (or lemons). Turn the food processor on high and start drizzling in the

juice from the chick peas. Continue to drizzle the juice from the chick peas into the food processor until the chick peas turn into a paste. Some dieters prefer a slightly thinner hummus than available in commercial preparation.

The entire recipe contains fewer than 300 calories, so throw half the recipe into a bowl and reserve half for later. Grab a handful of baked tortilla chips and enjoy this healthy, “cheat” snack.

Fruit Dipped in Chocolate

Chocolate is off-limits if you are trying to lose weight, right? Wrong – double wrong. Dark chocolate is packed with antioxidants and it tastes great when paired with fruit. Grab 10 strawberries and a couple tablespoons of dark chocolate chips. Melt the chips and drizzle the melted chocolate over the washed strawberries. Sprinkle with a little salt for an added treat for the

taste buds. You can also use bananas, raspberries, blueberries or any other fruit you enjoy. You can even try out some baked potato chips drizzled with chocolate if you have an adventurous spirit.

Nachos

Dieters often think of “cheat” snacks as sweet snacks or small snacks, but healthy nachos offer a huge serving for your caloric buck. Start your recipe with one serving of baked tortilla chips. Take a 1.4-inch slice out of a block of processed cheese spread like Velveeta. (This is not the healthiest option out there but it is the best option for a “cheat” snack.) Melt the cheese in the microwave until fluid. Drizzle the cheese over your tortilla chips. Finish the nachos with fresh diced tomato, fresh diced jalapeno and fat-free sour cream. As a matter of fact, throw any number of vegetables on top of your nachos to create a “cheat” snack worth its weight in gold.

Taking “Cheat” Foods to a Whole New Level

The world of dieting is not just about snacks. You live and exist in the real world with other people who either like their bodies the way they are or are currently not worried about losing weight. At any given time you will likely know multiple people trying to lose weight, but you must be prepared to handle being in the company of people who are not dieting without feeling like a third-wheel. Dieting in public is never fun, but why does your diet need to be an issue? With a little preparation and a little knowledge, you can eat just like the people you are hanging out with and never feel like you're the center of attention. Sometimes blending in is just what a dieter needs.

So, you're out and about or sitting at home and you're hungry. You don't feel like eating a protein

shake, meal replacement bar salad or frozen diet meal. What you really want is to throw caution to the wind and eat whatever you feel like eating. What if we told you that is exactly what you should do to keep your dieting sanity? “Cheating” once in a while on your diet does not have to mean making a horrible dietary choice; it simply means making the best choice at any given time. Here are a few “cheat” foods that you can eat and enjoy without ruining all that hard work.

Sushi

You want Chinese food and you want it now, but you know in the back of your mind that Chinese food is packed with fat, sugar and tons of calories. Take a step out of your comfort zone and try sushi instead of fried rice. Ask for brown rice instead of white rice and choose a sushi that does not contain cream cheese. Drizzle a little soy sauce over your entire sushi roll instead of

dipping each piece in the soy sauce and remember to eat all the wasabi you want.

Cheesy Southwest Omelet

When it comes to “cheat” meals, indulgence is key. You have to feel like you are actually “cheating” on your diet to give yourself the mental boost you need to keep going. Omelets are the perfect “cheat” meal because you can pack each one with tons of food creating an enormous meal without breaking the calorie bank.

Start with one whole egg in a mixing bowl. Add two to three egg whites for volume. Chop up all the vegetables you want, including broccoli, tomatoes, jalapenos, mushrooms, onions and garlic to add to your southwest omelet. You don't need to add any meat to your omelet because you get all the protein you need from the eggs.

Beat the eggs until frothy. Add all your vegetables to the bowl and mix well. You can

leave the tomatoes out if you want to top your omelet with uncooked tomatoes. Pour the ingredients of your omelet into a preheated small skillet on medium heat. Remember to spray the pan with butter-flavored non-stick spray. Allow the eggs to cook for 30 to 45 seconds before using a fork to stir the middle. Continue to stir the middle of your omelet until nearly set. Flip the omelet over and cook until done. Place a slice of cheese in the middle of your omelet (or a tablespoon of whipped cream cheese) and fold over. Carefully place on your plate and top with fresh tomatoes. Pour hot sauce on top, if desired.

Sweet Potato Fries

French fries are the ultimate cheat food, but you don't have to give up on your diet to enjoy crispy, tasty fries. Peel a sweet potato and wash. Cut the potato in strips that look like French fries. Spray the potatoes with high-heat non-stick spray (often marketed for grilling). Cook for 10 minutes in a

preheated 450-degree oven. Turn with a spatula and cook for an additional 5 to 10 minutes. Top your sweet potato fries with salt and enjoy.

Unlike prepared frozen French fries, sweet potato fries are all-natural and packed with vitamin A, potassium and fiber. One medium sweet potato supplies only 100 calories so you can enjoy your sweet potato fries without guilt. There's also the anti-inflammatory nature of sweet potatoes to help ease those aches and pains. .

Pizza

The ultimate “cheat” food is pizza. When dieting, you can't enjoy the pizza you love without breaking your diet, right? What if we told you to call up your local pizza parlor and order that pizza because you can “cheat” with delivery?

When choosing a “cheat” pizza, there are only a few rules. Choose the thin crust over hand-tossed or thick crust. Ask for light or half cheese,

but double up on vegetables. Order your pizza with light sauce to round out the perfect “cheat” meal. If you order a small, thin-crust pizza from a major pizza chain like Dominos with light cheese and every vegetable on the menu, you can eat half the pizza for just 350 calories. In terms of “cheating” you could actually consume the entire 700-calorie pizza and eat fewer calories than if you stopped for a small hamburger and fries meal at a fast food restaurant.

If you want to skip the delivery pizza, you can create a healthy “cheat” pizza at home. Throw a high-fiber, low-calorie tortilla in the oven to toast for a few minutes. Top with a mixture of fresh dice tomato, oregano and a little calorie-free sweetener. Top with all the veggies you want and sprinkle some reduced-fat cheese on top for an amazing alternative to delivery.

Spaghetti and Meatballs

Comfort foods are foods every dieter craves while trying to lose weight. The worst mistake a dieter can make is to avoid comfort foods all together. Deprivation starts when the dieter watches friends and family members eating comfort foods while they're chomping down on a salad. Spaghetti and meatballs is one of those comfort meals everyone loves, but no one knows how to enjoy on a diet. Here are a few tips for making this comfort meal just a little bit healthier.

Switching up the recipe from unhealthy to healthy starts with the pasta – whole grain pasta is a better alternative to plain white pasta. There are also vegetable and high-fiber pastas available. Cook the same pasta for everyone eating the meal so you feel included not excluded.

Next hit the tomato sauce with a one-two healthy punch. Throw out the commercial prepared

tomato sauce and replace it with homemade marinara sauce. Blanch a bunch of tomatoes in boiling water to loosen the skins. Peel tomatoes and throw into a large saucepan. Add a little water or chicken broth to the pan and turn the heat on low. Alternatively you can choose to cook the tomato sauce in a Crockpot. Add oregano, diced onions, diced garlic and a touch of calorie-free sweetener. Allow the marinara sauce to cook down for four to six hours.

Now, here comes the “cheat” part of the meal. Mix a pound of ground chicken with an equal amount of ground vegetables. Ideal choices for spaghetti and meatballs include broccoli, cabbage or carrots – try a mixture of all three. Grind the vegetables to nearly a paste in your food processor before adding to the ground chicken. Spice the meatball mixture as desired and form tons of tiny meatballs or a few huge meatballs. Bake or steam the meatballs until

done. Serve your healthy pasta topped with homemade marinara sauce and chicken meatballs for the best “cheat” meal you’ve ever had.

Veggie Sub

Now that you’ve cooked a ton of healthy “cheat” meals it’s time to talk more about eating on the go. Sometimes you need to stop quickly and get something to eat before heading back to work or on to an important appointment. When you need to eat fast, but you’re not interested in thinking about every calorie in the meal, choose vegetable alternatives. Veggies subs are available from just about every major sub chain in the United States. Even if a veggie sub is not on the menu, most chains will accommodate your order. Don’t be afraid to ask for double or triple of your favorite vegetables like cucumbers, spinach, tomatoes and green peppers. Vegetables are high in fiber and water so you feel fuller longer.

For added flavor, ask to have the vegetables grilled without oil, broiled or toasted. Feel free to add a little shredded or sliced cheese and a light vinaigrette or Dijon mustard.

Rounding Out the Night with a “Cheating” Good Dessert

Nothing says “cheat” like a sweet dessert, but there can’t possibly be any healthy alternatives in the dessert category unless you think with a creative, open mind and remember, you are human and there are times when you need to give yourself that little pep “cheat” to keep you on track. When it comes to cheat desserts most dieters are surprised by just how healthy some desserts can be.

Dark Chocolate

Chocolate is the mother of all “cheat” foods, but you are not “cheating” if you are supplying your

body with healthy antioxidants. Dark chocolate is antioxidant-rich and one miniature dark chocolate bar contains less than 50 calories so enjoy yourself and eat some chocolate.

Smores

One of our favorite cheat desserts are smores. Eating smores evokes images of sitting around a campfire telling scary stories even if you've never even seen a campfire. Smores offer that sweetness you need with the added touch of antioxidant support from dark chocolate. Place one reduced-fat graham cracker on a microwave-safe plate. Top with one miniature dark chocolate bar and five miniature marshmallows. Add a second reduced-fat graham cracker and microwave until the marshmallows melt. This fantastic "cheat" dessert supplies about 115 calories – so enjoy two if you like.

Chocolate Pudding and Graham Crackers

There are some foods that we just crave and chocolate is one of those foods. Dieters skip chocolate desserts because commercial desserts tend to be packed with tons of fat and little nutrition. You can change that with a little creativity. Instead of making your sugar-free chocolate pudding with cow's milk, choose unsweetened almond or soy milk. You may be able to find an unsweetened chocolate variety to boost that luscious chocolate flavor. Serve your chocolate pudding with one reduced-fat graham cracker and you'll instantly be in chocolate pie heaven.

Strawberry Shortcake

Chocolate not your thing, but you need something sweet to “cheat” with? Strawberry

shortcake is a simple dessert you can make for the entire family in less than five minutes. Dice up some strawberries and toss with calorie-free sweetener. Add a touch of balsamic vinegar for an entirely new dimension of taste. Cut a thin slice of commercial-prepared Angel food cake. One slice is about 1/12 the cake. Each slice supplies less than 75 calories and all of the cake goodness. Top the cake with the strawberry mixture and add a dollop of sugar-free or reduced-fat whipped topping to complete the dessert. If you are worried about the whipped topping, top your strawberry shortcake with ½ a container of plain Greek yogurt.

Rootbeer Float

When you were a child you never had to worry about calories or weight loss. Life was easy and you could eat anything you wanted without worrying about gaining five or 10 pounds.

Nothing feels more childlike than a rootbeer float

and you can enjoy one even when you're trying to lose weight.

The key to your "cheat" rootbeer float is the ice cream. Dr. Oz suggests choosing double-churned ice cream because more air is whipped into the cream so you get fewer calories. We suggest choosing the ice that best suits your taste buds, because you can cut those ice cream calories in other ways.

Add a heaping tablespoon of your favorite ice cream to a food processor or blender and add a cup of ice. Pulse until the mixture looks like a milk shake. Pour into a tall glass and add diet rootbeer. Add a straw and enjoy the best "cheat" dessert you've ever tasted. You'll instantly feel like a kid again.

If you find a low-calorie ice cream that you love (and there are tons of 100-calorie ice creams on the market) go for the real thing. The only

calories in your “cheat” rootbeer float are from the ice cream and 100 calories is not a “cheat” at all.

You Are Not a Failure Because You Want to “Cheat”

The last thing you need to hear is that “cheating” on your diet makes you a failure. There couldn’t be a statement that is further from the truth.

Fitness gurus who sell millions of extreme workouts, diet plans and diet supplements “cheat” too and if they say they don’t, they are not telling the truth. “Cheating” is a part of dieting that makes you feel human and, believe it or not, it can help you stick with your diet plan longer and lose more weight. The idea of a healthy weight loss plan is to adopt dietary and exercise changes you can live with for the rest of your life, not just the next 60 days. You live in the real world with real emotions and real temptations. You can make better choices and it will come

easier with time, but until the time comes when making healthier choices is second nature, choose “cheat” foods that help you feel normal and sane while preserving all the hard work you have accomplished.