



Empty Calories

You may have seen the term “empty calories,” or heard it used on TV. But what exactly are empty calories? Why are they so bad for you, and how can you avoid them?

Empty calories refer to foods that are high in calories and lack nutritional value. They have the same energy content of any other calorie, but they lack accompanying nutrients, such as vitamins, minerals, and fiber. This term is most often applied to the following:

- Soft drinks, sweets, and other items with added sugar
- Refined grains such as crackers, cookies, white rice, and white bread
- Deep-fried foods
- Alcohol

In addition to limiting the foods and beverages listed above, use the following tips to help minimize your intake of empty-calorie foods:

Find other ways to satisfy your sweet tooth. Sometimes a little bit goes a long way. Try some of these tactics:

- Instead of the sugary cereal you’ve been eating since you were a child, make a bowl of oatmeal and top it some honey or maple syrup.
- Snack on a bowl of applesauce; if it’s not sweet enough, add raisins or brown sugar.
- Fruits, both fresh and dried, are sweet and may offer you the sweet fix you’re looking for a 3 o’clock in the afternoon or after dinner. Try some fruit first, before heading for the candy, and see if that satisfies your sweet tooth.

Don’t be fooled by low-fat sweets. Often, when food manufacturers remove fat from cookies, crackers, cakes, and other snack foods, they add sugar to make up for the flavor lost with the fat. The result is that many low-fat snacks provide the same amount of calories – or more – as the original product. So a low-fat banner on the package doesn’t give you free reign to eat the whole box. It’s still important to look at calories and limit unhealthy snacks.

Choose diet versions. If you just love the taste of soda and can’t imagine having popcorn or pizza with anything else, try a diet version. Or, if it’s the bubbles you crave, have a glass of one of these zero calorie beverages:

- Seltzer water (some are flavored)
- Club soda (add a splash of fruit juice for flavor)
- Fresca

Source: LifeWorks

To learn more about the TeamHealth Wellness Program, go to teamhealth.com/wellness, or email wellness@teamhealth.com.