

Go Ahead, Cheat a Little!

It's not the kind of advice you think a nutritionist would give, but the occasional indulgence turns out to be the best way to enjoy weight loss success.

BY ALICE OGLETHORPE
PHOTOS MARTY BALDWIN

SWEET TREAT
Cut calories and sugar by passing on the packet and mixing your own hot chocolate: 2 Tbsp. dark unsweetened cocoa powder, 1 cup skim milk, and 2 tsp. sugar.

Sometimes, you can say yes to...

When eaten on occasion, these treats won't break your calorie bank.

Strawberry ice cream in a plain cake cone

A half-cup of the real thing runs about 120 calories and 5 g fat (plus 50 cal for the cone)—as long as you stick to standard brands like Breyers. Premium options are made with more whole milk and cream.



Whopper Jr.

Order this burger sans mayo, and you're getting 260 calories and 10 g fat. (Compare that to 630 calories and 35 g fat for the regular Whopper.) For more bulk in your bite, ask for extra veggies.

Center-cut bacon

Choosing center-cut dials down the calories, fat, and salt from this breakfast staple. One piece has about 25 calories, 2 g fat, and 120 mg sodium.



Sun Chips

With 21 g whole grains, 140 calories, and 6 g fat per 1-oz. bag, these crunchers are a step up from potato chips nutrition-wise. And thanks to the fat, they're more satisfying than the baked variety.



A small cookie (or two)

Classics like Chips Ahoy and Oreo only cost you about 45 to 65 calories and 2 g fat each. Pair with a glass of skim milk, and you get a shot of calcium, too.

If you had to jot down a list of foods that should be included in a healthy diet, chances are you'd rattle off virtuous options like grilled chicken, salmon, blueberries, brown rice, broccoli, and kale. And you'd be absolutely right. Study after study has shown that eating mostly vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean protein while having less than 15 g saturated fat and 1,500 mg sodium a day is the surest way to see the number on the scale drop—and improve your overall health. But what if we told you that cookies and bacon are sometimes allowed, too? “If you're super restrictive with your diet, you are practically guaranteeing a future rebellion,” says David Katz, M.D., founding director of Yale University's Prevention Research Center and author of the new book *Disease Proof*. “You'll constantly feel like you're suffering, and temptation is going to become stronger than your willpower, putting you at risk for a binge.”

In fact, recent research from Skidmore College has shown that people on a weight loss plan who “cheat”—either once a week or a little every day—still lose a significant amount of weight and body fat. For example, in one four-month study, dieters who treated themselves daily lost 12 pounds and 4 percent of their body fat. And one year later, most had maintained the loss. “Providing people with the chance to indulge assures them that it's OK to give in to temptation sometimes, which helps them stick to healthy choices most of the time,” explains professor Paul Arciero, the lead study author and director of the Human Nutrition and Metabolism Laboratory at Skidmore College.

Cheat on a diet and still lose weight? It's almost too good to be true, but a measured approach means you *can* have your cake and eat it, too. Check out our guidelines so you can do it the right way.

8 rules for smart splurges

How to eat your favorite foods and still lose weight:

1. HAVE A GAME PLAN. Come up with a rule about how often you can indulge. For example, allow yourself to eat fries just once a week, says Carolyn O'Neil, R.D., author of *The Slim Down South Cookbook*. That way you'll feel in control, and when you do have the treat, you won't feel guilty.

2. MAKE PORTION CONTROL A NO-BRAINER. “It may be cost-effective to buy a value-size container of chips, but that makes it way too easy to keep going back for more,” says David Grotto, R.D., author of *The Best Things You Can Eat*. “Pay a little more for the individually portioned snacks (you can usually find them in bulk at wholesale stores), and you won't be tempted to work your way through a whole bag.”

3. KEEP TRIGGER FOODS FAR, FAR AWAY. “Most people have at least one food that they can't stop eating,” says Cheryl Forberg, R.D., author of *Flavor First* and the chef and nutritionist for *The Biggest Loser*. “Remove temptation by taking a moment and thinking about what your weaknesses are. Decide then and there to never stock those items in your house.”

4. BE PRESENT IN THE MOMENT. “When you do indulge in a special treat, really savor it,” Forberg says. “Don't talk on the phone or read a book while you're munching; studies show that people eat more when they're distracted.”

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The average number of calories people cut from their daily diets when they allowed themselves a “cheat” treat once a day.

5. BE SELECTIVE. “Coco Chanel famously advised that you should remove at least one accessory before leaving the house. Use that same fashion philosophy when planning a cheat meal,” O’Neil says. “If you want a bacon cheeseburger, cheese fries, and a milkshake, skip one or two so you don’t go overboard.” For example, do the cheeseburger but have a kid-size order of fries and skip the milkshake.

6. PICK SWEET OR SALTY—NOT BOTH. “The appetite center in your brain responds independently to different flavors,” Katz says. “So when you have something sweet with something salty, your brain will let you eat a lot more before you feel satisfied. If you mix the two, you’ll end up devouring more of both.”

7. CUT BACK ON ADDED SUGAR AND SODIUM. “When you eat sugary and salty foods all day long, it takes a lot more sodium and sugar for your brain to register those tastes,” Katz says. “But if you cut out extra sweeteners or sodium in your non-splurge foods, you won’t have to eat as many chips or cookies to get to that happy place where you feel like you’ve treated yourself.”

8. SNAP BACK ASAP. Don’t let your splurge turn into a slippery slope. “What you want to avoid is eating one unhealthy thing and then telling yourself, *Oh, well, the whole day is ruined so I might as well keep bingeing and start fresh in the morning,*” Forberg says. Post-treat, get right back on the wagon and carry on with your normal healthy eating and exercise habits. ■



Thin crust frozen pizza
One slice of a cheese or veggie frozen pizza—like Kashi’s Thin Crust Pizza Margherita—has whole grains, a good amount of protein and fiber, and heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids, all for around 230 calories and 9 g fat (not bad for pizza).



Oven fries
Check the freezer aisle for fries that you bake (from brands like Alexia and Cascadian Farm). Made with canola oil, these taters also give you a dose of heart-healthy omega-3 fats, and the stats are pretty good: About 8 wedge fries have 110 calories and 3 g fat.



Hot chocolate
For an on-the-go option, a tall hot chocolate with nonfat milk and no whip from Starbucks won’t do too much damage at 190 calories and 2 g fat.