

6 "Diet-Friendly" Foods That Backfire

Just because it's zero calories, low fat, or fat free doesn't mean it will help you lose weight

By **Shape Editors**

In the quest for weight loss, cutting corners (and calories) by choosing fat free or ultra low-calorie foods seems like a no-brainer-chewing gum to quell hunger or spraying rather than tossing your salad with dressing, for example. But in some cases, certain "diet" foods can do more harm than good and won't get you any closer to your weight loss goals, says Laura Cipullo, an RD and CDE in private practice in New York City.

Here are six "guilt-free" foods that won't do you any favors.

Fat-Free Chocolate Syrup

Chocolate cravings are a fact of dieting, and squirting a little chocolate syrup in a glass of nonfat milk might seem like a good way to quash the cocoa beast. But it's actually no different than "regular" chocolate syrup, according to Cipullo. How is that possible? Marketing. "Chocolate syrup is fat-free naturally," she says. "It needs the addition of a fat like cocoa butter or heavy cream, in which case it becomes fudge sauce."

If you see this on store shelves, take a look around and see if you can find its "regular" counterpart, then compare the ingredients list. They are exactly the same, but companies slap a fat-free label on the same product to appeal to the dieting crowd. Go for some healthy and satiating dark chocolate instead, which studies show can actually dampen appetite.

Fat-Free Peanut Butter

Whether it's powdered peanut butter (to add to smoothies and shakes) or the spreadable type sans fat, skip it, Cipullo says. Not only are the calories nearly the same as the regular kind due to added sugars, but without the fat you're missing the whole point of peanut butter. The fat it contains is the healthy monounsaturated type that helps you feel full and may even help decrease belly fat, she says.

Moderation is key of course, but if you choose the natural variety (preferably with no added salt), it's so rich and packed with peanut-y flavor you will be satisfied with just a teaspoon or two anyway.

Broccoli

Yes, you read that right. As a way to fill up on very little calories or satisfy an emotional urge to eat, some dieters (and diet plans) suggest consuming as many raw or lightly cooked vegetables as you can stomach. Why does this backfire? First, eating too much roughage bloats your belly, makes you gassy, and can even cause constipation, none of which will help you look better in a bikini. Besides, bingeing is bingeing, whether it's a bag of potato chips or a whole head of broccoli-and will just perpetuate the cycle of emotional eating. Find a non-food activity like painting your nails or playing on Pinterest when you get the urge to nosh for no reason.

Chewing Gum

Another classic dieter trick: keeping your mouth occupied with sugar-free chewing gum. But this won't make you feel full or dampen cravings. In fact, the act of chewing sends signals to your gut to release enzymes and stomach acid for digestion, increasing appetite and even causing acid reflux. Plus, excess gum chewing can cause jaw pain and headaches. Skip the gum and brush your teeth post-meal instead. The minty taste will signal that mealtime is over, and it's good for your teeth.

Sugar-Free Candy

The first rule of diet food: Don't assume sugar-free means calorie-free-when one nutrient is removed, it must be replaced with another, Cipullo says. In this case, artificial sweeteners, which are known to cause gastrointestinal distress.

Sugar-free candies also contain carbohydrates-and that means calories. Plus, if you fill up on these, you're missing an opportunity to eat real food, the kind that fills you up and provides your body with energy and nutrients.

Salad Dressing Spray

These popular salad dressing mixers add a hint of flavor for not much calories, but you're doing your body a disservice when you choose them over a tablespoon of vinaigrette. The vegetables in your salad are only temporarily filling because they're so low in calories, and the addition of a healthy fat-based dressing (made with olive or canola oil) will keep hunger at bay, increase good cholesterol, and help your body absorb fat-soluble vitamins like Vitamin A, E, and K.

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