Six foods to help you lose weight and feel better

Kick your cravings, and avoid empty calories, with these filling food choices.

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Most Americans eat non-nutritious foods that cause them to go back for more. We ingest too many empty calories and refined carbohydrates, which break down quickly in the bloodstream and give us only temporary satisfaction. And soon we're reaching for more food—usually convenient, processed, sweet, and full of trans fat—leaving us hungry within an hour or two. It's a vicious cycle that can lead to overeating.

But what can we eat that will leave us feeling satisfied longer, without craving Twinkies or potato chips? Research suggests we should choose foods that have little or no effect on blood sugar: rich in fiber, low in energy density, and full of antioxidants. In this article, I describe six healthful foods and beverages that will curb your appetite, make you feel fuller longer, and fit into any lifestyle.

Fill up with fiber and protein

_Fiber-rich foods_, including whole-grain cereals, top the list. Fiber is the part of the plant or grain we can't digest. Insoluble fiber gives foods volume without adding a lot of calories. Soluble fiber stabilizes blood sugar, controls hunger, and slows down digestion. Studies highlighting dietary fiber and body weight have demonstrated a link between post-meal satiety and less hunger.1,2 Fiber slows digestion, which delays absorption into the bloodstream and keeps blood-sugar levels more constant. High-fiber diets such as the Mediterranean Diet have helped people lose weight and cut cholesterol. But don't replace high-fiber foods with fiber supplements; they don't offer the vitamins, minerals, or antioxidant benefits of whole foods.

The Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for fiber based on a 2,000 calorie diet is 25 – 30 gm. The average American gets 15 gm daily,1 but 1 cup of All-Bran contains 19.5 gm. Other good choices (in 1-cup servings) include black beans (15 gm, cooked), kidney beans (13 gm, cooked) avocado (10 gm), raspberries (8 gm), and almonds (8 gm).1
Chicken and other high-quality proteins have been linked with weight loss. High-quality protein helps maintain muscle mass and reduce body fat. Preserving muscle is essential; muscle tissue burns 70 times more calories than fat tissue. Subjects who ate a high-protein diet lost significantly more body fat and reported greater satiety than those who ate a high-carbohydrate diet (with similar amounts of fat). Protein helps slow absorption of glucose into the bloodstream, reducing hunger by lowering insulin levels, and also requires three times more energy to digest than carbohydrates or fats. Protein intake seems to play a key role in body weight regulation due to satiety and thermogenesis.

The RDA is 0.8 gm of protein per kilogram of ideal body weight for a healthy adult. Choose a variety of proteins to include all essential amino acids not synthesized by the body, which are easily found in most meat and dairy products. Some lean protein choices include boneless, skinless chicken breast (3.5 oz = 30 gm of protein), tuna (6 oz. can = 40 gm), low-fat cottage cheese (1 cup = 15 gm), low-fat yogurt (1 cup = 8–12 gm), tofu (1 cup = 20 gm), baked beans (1 cup = 12 gm), lima beans (1 cup = 11 gm), and walnuts (1 cup, chopped = 8 gm).

Round out your plate with produce

Grapefruit: Half a fresh grapefruit eaten before meals is associated with significant weight loss, improved insulin resistance in patients with metabolic syndrome, and significant reduction in insulin levels two hours after consumption, versus a placebo group. Foods with lower post-meal insulin levels are more efficient for the body to process for energy and become less stored fat.


The average grapefruit contains 90% water and only 39 calories, making it a food of low energy density. But grapefruit inhibits an intestinal enzyme that's responsible for the breakdown and absorption of some drugs, so its consumption can lead to side effects or drug toxicity. See the Mayo Clinic's Web site for a list of drugs that can cause problems with grapefruit consumption.

Apples: An apple a day is not just for keeping the doctor away. It can also help keep unwanted pounds away, according to a weight loss study involving 411 women over a 12-week period. Two groups followed the same diet, but one group also ate an apple or pear three times a day, and the other group ate oat cookies three times a day. The fruit group lost more weight and experienced a decrease in blood glucose as compared to the cookie group. Apples also have the strong antioxidant catechin (mainly in the peel), and both apples and pears are loaded with soluble fiber and water, which lowers their energy density and their glycemic value. Braeburn apples have more acid and less sugar, with only 80 calories in a medium apple. Jonagold apples contain the highest concentration of catechin—but don't remove the skin. Or try a medium Asian pear, a water-dense 51 calories with 4 gm of fiber.
Don't forget healthful fluids

**Water:** Water is essential for the survival of life. Sixty percent of our bodies is water, which is involved in all of our chemical processes. Burning calories requires an adequate supply of water. Dehydration is often mistaken for hunger. If you're not drinking enough fluids, you may find yourself eating more to rehydrate. Consider drinking at least eight ounces of water six or more times per day.

Barbara Rolls, PhD, author of *The Volumetric Weight-Control Plan*, suggests that incorporating water into food plays a crucial role in controlling hunger. Water adds volume to food, making it look larger and providing satiety with fewer calories. Also, when water is bound to food, it slows absorption and lasts longer in the stomach. Rolls recommends that you eat "water-rich dishes" such as soups and stews to help you feel fuller with less food. Most vegetables are water-dense, so a salad before your meal is also a good choice—just go light on the dressing!

**Tea:** Don't like water but need a way to meet your thirst requirements? Try black, green, or oolong tea. Green tea is especially rich in flavonoids and several polyphenols, particularly catechin. This antioxidant aids in digestion, fat oxidation, and energy expenditure, and may moderate blood sugar and insulin. A 12-week double-blind study concluded that daily consumption of tea containing 690 mg of catechins reduced body fat. In another study, green tea was concluded to have thermogenic properties and promote fat oxidation. The study also found that its thermogenic properties don't increase heart rate, so it's appropriate for people with hypertension and other cardiovascular complications.

Making every calorie pull its weight

One of the reasons we overeat is because we restrict calories or food groups. This drives us to eat less-nutritious foods and slows our metabolism to its survival mode. If you're eating empty calories, your metabolism doesn't have a reason to react. Instead, make your metabolism work for you. Eat healthful, nutrient-dense foods that slow insulin spikes and take longer to digest. And steer clear of processed foods; if refined sugars or white flour are listed in the first few ingredients on a food label, put it back on the shelf. If you can do this, and add several of the foods discussed in this article to your daily diet, you've won half the battle!

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**Grab one of these muffins for satisfaction on the go** Skipping breakfast is tempting, due to our fast-paced schedules and often irregular shifts. But you need to start with a satisfying, nutritious meal, or you may find yourself playing catch-up with empty calories for the rest of your day! My muffin recipe will allow you to grab something convenient and healthful on your way out the door—and they'll stay fresh for several days.
Fruit and Oat Muffins 1 cup rolled oats (not quick oats), ¾ cup low fat butter milk (skim milk also works), 1 cup whole wheat flour, 1 tsp. baking powder, 1 tsp. baking soda, 2 tsp. ground cinnamon, 1 medium orange, 1/2 cup sugar, 1 cup canola oil, 1 whole egg, 1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries, peaches, or raspberries All-Bran (optional; enough to sprinkle on top about halfway through baking) ½ cup chopped walnuts or hazelnuts (optional)

- Preheat oven 400. Stir together oats and buttermilk in small bowl and set aside.
- Whisk flour, baking powder, baking soda and cinnamon in medium bowl and set aside.
- Grate zest from orange in a large bowl. Squeeze orange juice and add to zest. Whisk in sugar, oil, and egg until mixture is smooth.
- Blend in oatmeal mixture, followed by flour mixture. Stir until ingredients are just combined, then gently fold in fruit and nuts. Spoon batter into lined muffin pan.
- Bake for 15–18 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center of muffin comes out clean. Yield: 12 large muffins, about 150 – 180 calories per muffin.

References:


