

Fat-Free Isn't Always "Free"

Remember that a calorie is always a calorie whether it comes from fat or carbohydrate. Reducing fat and saturated fat in your family's diet is important to maintaining heart health and reducing calories. However, fat-free or reduced-fat food choices aren't always low in calories. They can be high in sugar or other nutrients that increase calories.

Some reduced-fat or fat-free foods provide almost the same number of calories as the regular food. They are not the solution to weight loss. This is especially true if you think you can eat more of a reduced-fat food than you would eat of a regular item. For example:

- A 30-gram serving of reduced-fat chocolate chip cookies (three cookies) contains 118 calories, while an equal serving of the regular version has 142 calories.
- A one-ounce serving of baked tortilla chips has 113 calories, versus 143 calories for the same amount of regular tortilla chips.
- A two tablespoon serving of fat-free caramel topping contains the same number of calories (103) as an equal amount of homemade caramel topping with butter.

[See a more detailed comparison](#) of fat-free or reduced-fat calorie versus regular prepared food items. It is important to limit fat and sugar in your family's diet. Fat has twice as many calories as protein or carbohydrate, so it's easy to see that reducing fat is important to energy balance.

Sugar is found naturally in some foods, like fructose in fruits or lactose in milk. However, sugar is added to many prepared foods and drinks like high-fructose corn syrup in sweetened beverages and breakfast cereals.

Health experts offer several reasons why it is important to cut back on the consumption of these products or cut out sugar from your diet in other ways:

- Studies show that people who consume many foods and drinks with added sugar tend to consume more calories than people who consume fewer of these foods. They also show a link between weight gain and drinking sweetened beverages. Cutting back on added sugars, especially from sweetened beverages such as regular soda and fruit punch, can help you and your family maintain a healthy weight.
- Added sugar provides calories but no additional nutrients. An eating plan that helps you and your family maintain a healthy weight is one that focuses on getting plenty of nutrients within your calorie needs.
- Many children and teens, especially girls, don't get enough calcium, a mineral that's important for strong bones and teeth and other body functions. Giving your children [fat-free or low-fat milk](#) instead of sweetened beverages can give their bodies a boost.

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