

You call that Health Food?

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Men's Health

Take a moment and consider this logic: 1. Fat-free foods are healthy. 2. Skittles are fat-free. 3. Therefore, Skittles are healthy. Make sense? Of course not. But it's exactly the type of reasoning that food manufacturers want you to use.

You see, in our example, we started with a false premise. That's because the term "fat-free" is often code for "high-sugar"—an attribute that makes a product the opposite of healthy. Case in point: Johns Hopkins University researchers recently determined that high blood sugar is an independent risk factor for [heart disease](#). So high-glycemic foods—those such as sugars and starches that raise your blood sugar dramatically—are inherently unhealthy. (See Skittles, above.)

Unfortunately, faulty food logic is far less obvious when you're shopping outside the candy aisle. Why? Because making healthy choices isn't as simple as knowing that beans are packed with fiber, or that fruits are loaded with disease-fighting antioxidants. After all, manufacturers often add ingredients, such as sugar, that can instantly turn a [good snack](#) bad. As a result, many of the products that you think are wholesome are anything but. And that's why we've created our list of the dirty dozen:

## 12 "Healthy" Foods That You Can—and Should—Live Without.

### 1. Yogurt with fruit at the bottom

- **The upside:** Yogurt and fruit are two of the healthiest foods known to man.
- **The downside:** Corn syrup is not. But that's exactly what's used to make these products supersweet. For example, a cup of Colombo blueberry yogurt contains 36 grams (g) of sugar, only about half of which is found naturally in the yogurt and fruit. The rest comes in the form of "added" sugar—or what we prefer to call "unnecessary."
- **The healthy alternative:** Opt for Dannon Light 'n Fit Carb & Sugar Control Yogurt, which has 90 percent less sugar than regular yogurt does.

### 2. Baked Beans

- **The upside:** Beans are packed with fiber, which helps keep you full and slows the absorption of sugar into your bloodstream.
- **The downside:** The baked kind are typically covered in a sauce made with brown and white sugars. And because the fiber is located inside the bean, it doesn't have a chance to interfere with the speed at which the sugary glaze is digested. Consider that 1 cup of baked beans contains 24 g sugar: That's about the same amount in 8 ounces of regular soda.

- **The healthy alternative:** Red kidney beans, packed in water. You get the nutritional benefits of legumes, but without the extra sugar. They don't even need to be heated: Just open the can, rinse thoroughly and serve. Try splashing some hot sauce on top for a spicy variation.

### 3. California Roll

- **The upside:** The seaweed it's wrapped in contains essential nutrients, such as iodine, selenium, calcium and omega-3 fats.
- **The downside:** It's basically a Japanese sugar cube. That's because its two other major components are white rice and imitation crab, both of which are packed with fast-digesting carbohydrates and almost no protein.
- **The healthy alternative:** Real sushi made with tuna or salmon. These varieties have fewer bad carbohydrates, while providing a hefty helping of high-quality protein. Better yet, skip the rice, too, by ordering sashimi.

### 4. Granola Bars

- **The upside:** Granola is made with whole oats, a nutritious food that's high in fiber.
- **The downside:** The oats are basically glued together with ingredients like high-fructose corn syrup, honey and barley malt—all of which quickly raise blood sugar.
- **The healthy alternative:** Grab a low-sugar meal replacement bar that contains no more than 5 g net carbs—those are the ones that affect blood sugar—and at least 15 g protein. We like Myoplex Carb Sense.

### 5. Pasta Salad

- **The upside:** Most pasta-salad recipes include a variety of fresh vegetables.
- **The downside:** The main ingredient is white-flour pasta, a close relative of white bread.
- **The healthy alternative:** Egg salad has no impact on blood sugar, and a University of Connecticut review reports that there is no connection between egg consumption and heart disease.

### 6. English Muffins

- **The upside:** One English muffin—two halves—has half as many calories as two slices of bread. So it's better for a breakfast sandwich.
- **The downside:** Most English muffins not only raise blood sugar significantly but are nearly devoid of fiber, protein and vitamins. This makes them a great example of a food that provides only empty calories.
- **The healthy alternative:** One hundred percent whole-wheat English muffins are a decent start, but we like the kind made from sprouted grains, which contain no flour and are packed with nutrients. For instance, Food for Life sprouted-grain

English muffins have twice as much fiber and 30 percent more protein compared with the typical 100 percent whole-wheat version. (For stores, check [foodforlife.com](http://foodforlife.com).)

## 7. Croutons

- **The upside:** They're so small they contribute very few calories to your overall meal, yet they add a satisfying crunch.
- **The downside:** Most croutons are made with the same refined flour that's used in white bread, a food with a higher glycemic index than sugar.
- **The healthy alternative:** Sliced roasted almonds. They're crunchy, sugar-free and high in monounsaturated fats, the same type of healthy fats found in olive oil. In fact, Harvard University researchers estimate that substituting nuts for an equivalent amount of carbohydrates results in a 30 percent reduction in heart-disease risk.

## 8. Fat-Free Salad Dressing

- **The upside:** Cutting out the fat reduces the calories that a dressing contains.
- **The downside:** Sugar is added to provide flavor. But perhaps more important is that the removal of fat reduces your body's ability to absorb many of the vitamins found in a salad's vegetables. Ohio State University researchers discovered that people who ate a salad dressing that contained fat absorbed 15 times more beta-carotene and five times more lutein—both powerful antioxidants—than when they downed a salad topped with fat-free dressing.
- **The healthy alternative:** Choose a full-fat dressing that's made with either olive oil or canola oil and has less than 2 g carbs per serving.

## 9. Fruit Cocktail

- **The upside:** The main ingredient is fruit.
- **The downside:** If you don't read the label closely, you may choose a brand that's packed in heavy syrup. For instance, a 1/2-cup serving of syrupy fruit cocktail contains 23 g added sugar.
- **The healthy alternative:** Look for fruit cocktail canned in "100 percent juice," not syrup.

## 10. Reduced-Fat Peanut Butter

- **The upside:** Even the reduced-fat versions pack a substantial quantity of heart-healthy monounsaturated fat.
- **The downside:** Many commercial brands are sweetened with "icing sugar"—the same finely ground sugar used to decorate cupcakes. In fact, each tablespoon of Skippy contains half a teaspoon of the sweet stuff. Reduced-fat versions are the worst of all, because they contain less healthy fat and even more icing sugar.

- **The healthy alternative:** An all-natural, full-fat peanut butter—such as Crazy Richard's or Teddy's—that contains no added sugar.

## 11. Pretzels

- **The upside:** One ounce has just 110 calories.
- **The downside:** These twisted low-fat snacks have one of the highest glycemic indexes of any food. In fact, they rank above ice cream and jelly beans in their ability to raise blood sugar.
- **The healthy alternative:** Cheese crisps—baked pieces of cheese that crunch like chips.

## 12. Corn Oil

- **The upside:** It contains omega-6 fatty acids—unsaturated fats that don't raise cholesterol.
- **The downside:** Corn oil has 60 times more omega-6s than omega-3s, the type of healthy fats found in fish, walnuts and flaxseed. Studies suggest that a high intake of omega-6 fats relative to omega-3 fats increases inflammation, which boosts your risk of cancer, arthritis and obesity.
- **The healthy alternative:** Olive or canola oils, which have a far better ratio of omega-6s to omega-3s.