

July 2022

Oral Wellness Newsletter

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Why is junk food so junky?

Chips and dip, cheesy poofs, glazed donuts and drippy fast-food burgers. These are some of the most popular junk foods of all time.

So, what exactly makes junk foods bad for you? And why do they taste so good?

[Michael Jacobson](#), a scientist and healthy food activist, came up with the phrase “junk food”. Most junk foods are highly processed and low in nutritional value. They’re also packed with calories, cholesterol, saturated fats, salt, refined white sugar and white flour.

Eating too many fatty foods can raise your cholesterol level and the amount of plaque in your blood vessels, risk factors for heart disease, heart attacks and strokes. And overindulging in sugar can cause weight gain, which can lead to diabetes, plus tooth decay.

Remember, it’s not just sweet treats that can lead to cavities. The starches and carbohydrates in snacks made with white flour – think crackers and pizza dough – break down into sugar molecules during digestion. It doesn’t matter if sugar comes from something savory – it’s still bad for your teeth.

Unfortunately, junk food cravings are hard to resist. (Ever try eating just one potato chip?) Junk food brands know how to tempt us with tasty flavor-and-texture combinations like salty-crunchy or creamy-sweet.

Junk foods make us feel good emotionally, too. Foods that are high in salt, sugar and fat trigger pleasure sensors in our brains. And very high sugar or high fat diets seem to cause the

release of hormones that [reduce stress](#), making us desire our “comfort” foods even more.

If you're hankering for a big bowl of mac and cheese or ice cream, there are healthy alternatives you can buy instead. Check out the top swaps recommended by two registered dietitians:

17 Healthy versions of your favorite junk foods



5 Tips to keep those rays at bay

July is UV Safety Month, the perfect time for a reminder on the dangers of getting too much sun. Whether you're headed to a baseball game, outdoor picnic or all-day beach adventure, sun protection should be a top priority.

Why sun protection is important

Sunburn hurts, and excessive sun exposure can lead to dry, discolored, wrinkled or leathery-looking skin. Lack of protection increases the risk of skin cancer, the most common of all cancers. Knowing what precautions to take can help you stay safe and still have fun—without worrying about those intense rays.

1. Drink plenty of water

Prevent dehydration by sipping on water. [Women need](#) at least 12 cups a day and men need at least 16 cups. Drinking water is also considered nature's cavity fighter. With every gulp, you're rinsing food bits and cavity-causing bacteria off of your teeth and gums.

2. Slather on sunscreen

Avoid sunburn by applying sunscreen with an SPF of [at least 30](#). And lips need protection, too. Wearing SPF 30 lip balm can help prevent [solar cheilitis](#), which is irreversible damage to lip tissue, as well as lip cancer.

3. Seek shady spots

Take cover from time to time under trees, pergolas, pavilions or large umbrellas. Wide-brimmed hats and caps with visors can also supply sun relief while protecting delicate areas of your face and neck.

4. Limit direct sunlight exposure

The sun's [rays are the strongest](#) from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., so limit direct exposure during this period. Try to plan activities in the shade during the middle of the day.

5. Have sunburn remedies on hand

Over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream and ibuprofen can help reduce redness, swelling or discomfort. Avoid benzocaine products, which can irritate skin or cause allergic reactions. Moisturizers that have aloe vera or soy can also ease the pain.



Craving that? Eat this instead.

July 21 is National Junk Food Day and Dan Tison doesn't want you to celebrate – at least not by bingeing on a box of biggie fries. United Concordia Oral Wellness Consultant – plus health and fitness expert – Dan offers guilt-free substitutions for snacks you may be tempted to indulge in on this occasion.

Lightly salted almonds, not potato chips

Though the saturated fat content for both is just 1g per serving, almonds have less sodium (10mg vs 40mg), more fiber (3g vs 1g), and 8 times more calcium (80mg vs 10mg).

Homemade quesadillas, not frozen snacks

Sure, frozen apps are convenient, but the calorie and saturated fat content is high. And it's almost impossible to find products that are low in sodium and made with whole grains and smart fats.

Try topping a whole-wheat or whole-grain tortilla with reduced-fat cheese for 12g of protein and 8g of fiber. Add veggies for more nutrients, then give it a quick zap in the microwave to get it melty. Dan adds tomatoes, chopped peppers, spinach and onions.

Chocolate protein shake, not chocolate ice cream

Get your chocolate fix in a creamy, milkshake form. With upwards of 25g of protein in each serving, typical protein shakes are low-cal, low-sugar and super satisfying. Here's why – meals high in protein increase the production of peptide YY, a gut hormone that makes you feel fuller, faster.

Greek yogurt dip, not French onion dip

Dips made with Greek yogurt have far less calories and fat – and more protein – than sour cream-based dip. Greek yogurt is also calcium rich – great for your teeth and bones. Dan

suggests whipping up a batch of [slow-roasted onion dip](#) made with Greek yogurt, garlic and olive oil.

Sweet potato nachos, not regular nachos

A true superfood, sweet potatoes are rich in B vitamins, vitamin C, calcium, iron and [many more nutrients](#). Swap out fried tortilla chips for crispy sweet potato chips. Simply slice potatoes into thin rounds and bake 45 minutes at 425 degrees. Then top with black beans, chopped peppers, corn, tomatoes, low-fat cheese and avocado.



Build a first aid kit for your mouth

Sudden dental “uh-ohs” can happen any time. While you’re traveling. During exercise. And if you’re a klutz, even just walking can be dangerous.

When a mishap happens, it’s important to [find a dentist](#) right away. If that’s not possible, a well-stocked dental emergency kit can help you deal with pain, bleeding and other problems until you can see a dental professional.

What to pack in a dental emergency kit

Arrange everything in an airtight container and keep it handy so you can quickly grab it if you need to.

Alcohol wipes – Use to clean and disinfect the injured area.

Cold compress – Apply to the area to reduce swelling.

Cotton balls – Use to help control bleeding.

Cotton swabs – Use to clean the area or applicators.

Dental floss – Use to dislodge food particles stuck between teeth.

Dental mirror – Use to inspect hard-to-see areas inside the mouth.

Dental wax – Use to coat sharp edges of braces wires or other orthodontia.

Latex gloves – Wear to aid someone other than yourself. (Use vinyl gloves if allergic to latex.)

Temporary dental filling material – Use to temporarily fill the hole where a filling was lost.

Over-the-counter pain medication – Pack ibuprofen, [Orajel](#) or [Orabase-B](#) to help reduce discomfort.

Petroleum jelly – Apply to dislodged crown and slip back over tooth for a temporary seal.

Plastic snack bags – Use to store teeth, crowns or other dental appliances that may fall out.

Salt – Mix with warm water to rinse mouth if cheeks, gums or tongue are injured. Add a pinch to water to transport a knocked-out tooth to the dentist if milk isn't available and the tooth won't easily go back into the socket.

Sterile gauze – Wrap knocked-out tooth for safekeeping or dab bleeding area.

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