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It's easy to underestimate caloric intake

I work out five days a week and eat less than 1,400 calories a day, but I'm not losing weight. What gives?

Are you sure about that calorie count? "You'd be surprised how common it is to underestimate how much you're really eating," says Lisa Young, author of "The Portion Teller." Write down everything that goes in your mouth for a week, then calculate the calories using a standardized nutritional database like www.ars.usda.gov/foodsearch.

If you really are getting fewer than 1,400 calories per day, you may actually need to increase your intake. "Skimping can slow your metabolism," says Elisa Zied, author of "So What Can I Eat?!" Based on your high level of activity, you may require as many as 2,200 calories a day (so eat up, girlfriend!).

"To safely lose a pound a week, subtract 500 from that for a total intake of 1,700 per day," recommends Zied.

Condiments

Q. *I know ketchup is high in lycopene. What other condiments are good for me?* Chutneys are made from antioxidant-packed fruits like apricots and cranberries, hummus offers low-fat protein and fiber, and mustard contains immune-boosting zeaxanthin.

As for ketchup, we had high hopes during that whole "it's a vegetable" debate back in the '80s, but unfortunately, while it does contain lycopene, ketchup isn't the best source, since it's also full of sugar. A healthier choice? Salsa.

Corn syrup

Q. *I keep seeing high fructose corn syrup as an ingredient in the foods I buy. Should I stay away from it?*

That would be difficult. High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is a very common sweetener, composed of about 55 percent fructose and 45 percent glucose -- in other words, just another form of sugar, explains Zied. It isn't necessarily harmful; the main problem with HFCS is that it's often found in high-calorie foods that are otherwise devoid of nutrients. "Some research shows a connection between HFCS-laced beverages and weight gain, but there's still no solid proof," says Milton Stokes, chief dietician at St. Barnabas Hospital and Nursing Home in New York City and a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. Consider the overall healthfulness of foods -- their fat, calorie, fiber and vitamin content -- rather than obsessing about a single ingredient.

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