

Labelwatch

"Healthy" Foods That Aren't

More and more "healthy" buzzwords are appearing on food packages. But proceed with caution—just because a product lacks fat, gluten or sugar doesn't mean it's healthier. Here's why:

—Patricia Bannan, M.S., R.D. & Katie Andrews

Fat-Free You might think you're making a healthy choice, but eating certain fat-free foods may cause you to gain, not lose weight. In a new study from Purdue University, rats fed potato chips containing Olean (a no-calorie, fat-free fat substitute) subsequently put on more weight than rats fed regular chips. More research is needed, but experts think fat substitutes may interfere with your body's natural ability to regulate how much food is enough, causing you to eat more.

Gluten-Free If you don't have celiac disease or gluten sensitivity, think twice before ditching gluten: being gluten-free doesn't automatically make a product better for you. Gluten-free products can vary greatly in the amount of fat, protein and other nutrients they contain. Some gluten-free breads have up to 13 times more fat and 16 times more protein than others, according to a recent study that compared 11 different gluten-free breads.



Diet Soda To most, the word "diet" equals weight loss. But diet soda may not be holding up its end of the bargain. Researchers at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio recently found that people who drank two or more diet sodas daily had a six-times-greater increase in waist circumference at the end of the 10-year study than those who didn't drink diet soda at all. Those bigger waist sizes may be due to the "I saved here, I can splurge there" theory of dieting, says researcher Sharon Fowler, M.P.H. Or perhaps the artificial sweeteners in diet soda stoked diet-soda drinkers' appetite, as other research suggests.



You can send Nutrition Editor Brierley Wright, M.S., R.D., your nutrition questions at eatingwell.com/go/askus.

Ask Brierley

Which will help me slim down—6 mini meals or 3 squares? —Corey L., Washington, D.C.

When it comes to dieting, many experts say it's best to eat mini meals every few hours. The idea: eating frequently may help curb your appetite and stabilize your blood sugar—preventing the dips that leave you feeling hungry—which makes slimming down more doable. But recent research, published in the journal *Obesity*, suggests that grazing on multiple mini meals won't promote weight loss any more than sticking to three squares. When overweight or obese dieters spread a very-low-calorie diet over six meals their appetite and hunger were no different than when they ate the same diet in three daily meals. And, truth be told, these findings support older, similar research.

So what's that mean for you? *How much* you eat is more important than *how often* you eat. If eating more often causes you to overeat—say multiple meals turn into all-day grazing—try eating fewer meals. But if you're a three-meal-a-day person who gorges each time you sit down because you're so famished, adding in a snack or two, even three, might help. Whatever you choose, including fiber—fruits, vegetables and whole grains—and lean protein in your meals and snacks is essential when you're dieting, as both nutrients provide staying power to keep you feeling full until you eat next. —B.W.

Fresh Findings

Breathe Easy

Did you know that eating fruit could lower your risk of asthma? That's the news from Dutch researchers who tracked the asthma symptoms and diets of children from birth through eight years of age and found that those who ate more fruit throughout their childhood had lower rates of asthma. Researchers

think the antioxidants in fruits and veggies could protect airways from damage, possibly reducing risk of asthma, which afflicts more than 8 percent of Americans. Other research has specifically found that apples, bananas and vitamin-C-rich fruits, such as citrus, may lower asthma risk.