

What is a Smoothie?

Not All Smoothies Are Created Alike

Merriam-Webster defines *smoothie* as a creamy beverage made of fruit blended with juice, milk, or yogurt. A wide variety of concoctions and products are referred to as “smoothies.” We have grouped smoothies into three categories. These categories are smoothies that include:

1. Blended fresh or frozen fruit(s) and/or vegetable(s)
2. Liquid or powder mixes (no fresh, frozen, or canned fruit or vegetables)
3. Other (these include refrigerated pre-made products such as bottled smoothies or yogurt drinks)

Although adding fresh or frozen fruit and/or vegetables to a smoothie increases its nutritional value, there are other ingredients, such as ice cream, honey, or highly sweetened yogurt, that could turn this beverage into more of a sweet treat. Therefore, within each category there can be a range of smoothies that vary from “healthy smoothies” to “dessert smoothies.” In general, smoothies made with fresh fruits and vegetables are more likely to fit into the “healthy smoothie” category.

Some products called “smoothies” that are sold at restaurants, stores, and fairs may be made from powdered ingredients and may include artificial flavors. Smoothies made from mixes and pre-made packaged smoothies are more likely to contain high quantities of added sugars and therefore are more likely to fit into the dessert category. Read the label to know what the smoothie contains. It is best to watch your smoothie being made from whole, real fruit whether you are at home or away.

“Healthy Smoothies” vs. “Dessert Smoothies”

“Healthy Smoothies”

The 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans outline five general components of healthy eating (see table below). Three of these components are of particular importance when choosing a smoothie for its nutritional qualities:

- Focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount.
- Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats and reduce sodium intake.
- Shift to healthier food and beverage choices.

2015 U.S. Dietary Guidelines

1. **Follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan.** All food and beverage choices matter. Choose a healthy eating pattern at an appropriate calorie level to help achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, support nutrient adequacy, and reduce the risk of chronic disease.
2. **Focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount.** To meet nutrient needs within calorie limits, choose a variety of nutrient-dense foods across and within all food groups in recommended amounts.
3. **Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats and reduce sodium intake.** Consume an eating pattern low in added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. Cut back on foods and beverages higher in these components to amounts that fit within healthy eating patterns.
4. **Shift to healthier food and beverage choices.** Choose nutrient-dense foods and beverages across and within all food groups in place of less healthy choices. Consider cultural and personal preferences to make these shifts easier to accomplish and maintain.



5. Support healthy eating patterns for all. Everyone has a role in helping to create and support healthy eating patterns in multiple settings nationwide, from home to school to work to communities.

U.S. Dietary Guidelines: (<https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/executive-summary/#guidelines>)

According to the MyPlate website, “the most nutritious or *nutrient-dense* foods include vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seafood, eggs, beans and peas, unsalted nuts and seeds, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, and lean meats and poultry – all with little or no saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars.” Therefore, smoothies made with fruits and vegetables, 100% fruit juice and yogurt, with zero or very limited amounts of added sugar, sodium, and saturated fat would be considered healthy foods suitable for daily consumption. Some smoothies are so nutrient-dense that they meet the nutritional standards for an entrée in school meals (see *Smoothie Advocacy Resource Sheet*).

Specific recommendations within the U.S. Dietary Guidelines state that a healthy eating pattern includes:

- A variety of vegetables from all of the subgroups—dark green, red, and orange
- Legumes (beans and peas)
- Fruits, especially whole fruits
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and/or fortified soy beverages
- Limited starchy vegetables

Smoothies offer a fun and delicious way to include fruits, yogurt, and various vegetable subgroups (different colored vegetables) in foods consumed by children and adults. For example, individuals who do not like plain bananas or spinach might enjoy drinking these ingredients in their smoothies when they are blended with other ingredients. Serving smoothies as a part of school breakfast can increase the amount of fruit consumed by students. Smoothies that contain a lot of ice are also a good source of water.

Therefore, to make a “healthy smoothie,” include a variety of fruits and/or vegetables, avoid or limit added sugars and fats, avoid added sodium, and include plenty of ice in your recipe.

Dessert Smoothies

Dessert smoothies, on the other hand, contain ingredients that the Dietary Guidelines advise individuals to cut back, including added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. A key recommendation of the U.S. Dietary Guidelines specifies that individuals should consume less than 10% of calories per day from added sugars to achieve healthy eating patterns within their calorie limits. The American Heart Association recommends that individuals limit their intake of added sugars to 6-9 teaspoons per day. Currently Americans consume 2-3 times this amount on average.

Ingredients to avoid (to make your smoothies match the Dietary Guidelines):

- Ice cream and whipping cream
- Sugar-sweetened yogurts
- Processed fruits or vegetables with added sugar or added salt
- Honey

More Ideas

For additional healthy recipe smoothie ideas, try these websites:

- www.fruitandveggiesmorematters.org
- <http://recipes.millionhearts.hhs.gov/>
- www.bestbonesforever.org/recipes_main/

References

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