

What's really on your plate?



We are what we eat – but how much do you actually know about the contents of your food? Here, Champneys nutritionist

Melissa Cohen counts the sugar, salt and fat in some everyday choices – and reveals the meals we should be making

Interview and research by Ruby Millington

BREAKFAST



Bacon & eggs:
Four thin-cut rashers, grilled
Sugar: 0g Fat: 11.75g
Salt: 1.41g

55g instant oat porridge, made with water
Sugar: 5.4g Fat: 3.1g Salt: 0.3g



50g fresh blueberries
Sugar: 5g Fat: 0.15g Salt: 0g

Melissa's verdict: What makes porridge so healthy is the whole rolled oats, which provide fibre and a slow-releasing carbohydrate to sustain energy. Instant porridge defeats the object because it is refined.

SAINTLY SWAP: Try 40g of whole rolled oats mixed with coconut, soya or almond milk and, as you need protein with every meal, stir in some peanut butter instead of blueberries.



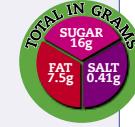
Two boiled eggs
Sugar: 0g Fat: 13.8g Salt: 0.46g

SAINTLY SWAP:

Switch the bacon for a healthier type of saturated fat such as smoked salmon or kippers.



30g corn flakes
Sugar: 2.4g Fat: 0.3g Salt: 0.38g
200ml whole milk
Sugar: 9.4g Fat: 7.2g Salt: 0.3g
1 tsp white granulated sugar
Sugar: 4.2g Fat: 0g Salt: 0g



Melissa's verdict: This is little more than a bowl of carbohydrates – a lower-sugar cereal, like oat flakes, has more nutrients.

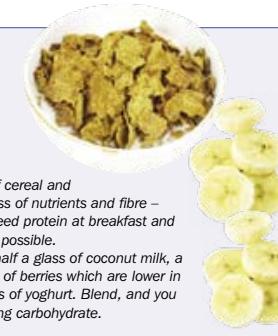
SAINTLY SWAP: Add nuts or flax seeds and use skimmed milk – too much dairy has been linked to inflammatory disorders.



30g bowl of bran flakes
Sugar: 6g Fat: 1g Salt: 0.5g
200ml semi-skimmed milk
Sugar: 9.6g Fat: 3.6g Salt: 0g
Six-inch banana, sliced
Sugar: 12g Fat: 0g Salt: 0.3g

Melissa's verdict: Realistically, nobody has just 30g of cereal and bran flakes are so refined – a process that results in a loss of nutrients and fibre – that they're not going to keep you full. You need protein at breakfast and something as nutritious and un-refined as possible.

SAINTLY SWAP: Make a smoothie with half a glass of coconut milk, a couple of tablespoons of oats, a handful of berries which are lower in sugar than banana, and two tablespoons of yoghurt. Blend, and you have really nice protein with slow-releasing carbohydrate.



LUNCH

One plain bagel



Sugar: 4.6g Fat: 1.5g Salt: 0.7g

50g smoked salmon



Sugar: 0.05g Fat: 4.85g Salt: 1.75g
30g cream cheese
Sugar: 0.9g Fat: 7g Salt: 0.3g

SAINTLY SWAP: Just half the bagel, served open, would be better – use a seeded one to add protein – and have scrambled or hard-boiled egg with it (30g of cream cheese is barely a smear).



300g bowl of wild-mushroom soup

Sugar: 2.7g Fat: 2.4g Salt: 1.7g

Melissa's verdict: High in salt but better than the French onion soup (below).

SAINTLY SWAP: Make your own broth – that way you know what you're eating and there's no sugar and less salt. Use marrowbones and shin beef from a butcher, or a chicken carcass. Simmer with onions, carrots and leeks for four hours and you'll have a great stock that lasts for days, to use as the basis of other dishes.



200g baked beans



Sugar: 10.3g Fat: 0.4g Salt: 1.3g
Two slices of thick-sliced white bread
Sugar 3.8g Fat 2.6g Salt 1g
10g salted butter
Sugar: 0g Fat: 8.2g Salt: 0.17g
15g serving brown sauce
Sugar: 3.5g Fat: 0g Salt: 0.2g

Melissa's verdict: You'd be better off eating the reduced-sugar version of beans on toast (below left), which is less refined and much more satisfying.

300g bowl of French onion and red wine soup

Sugar: 11.4g Fat: 2.1g Salt: 1.5g



Melissa's verdict: This is very high in sugar. **SAINTLY SWAP:** Opt for soups in cartons rather than tins as they contain fewer preservatives.



SNACK ATTACK?

Four all-butter Gruyère cheese twists
Sugar: 1.2g Fat: 8g Salt: 0.44g
Half a tub of tomato salsa

Sugar: 5.8g Fat: 3.8g Salt: 0.58g

Melissa's verdict: This snack is just sugar and carbs
SAINTLY SWAP: Replace with crudité, mini peppers and olives, and guacamole for the dip.



DIET SPECIAL

Tuna and cucumber brown sandwich
Sugar: 2.9g Fat: 5.3g Salt: 1.37g

180g pack of mixed melon and grapes
Sugar: 15.1g Fat: 0.2g Salt: 0g

Melissa's verdict: Always look for a healthy, "lite" option

SAINTLY SWAP: A wrap would be even better than a sandwich.

TOTAL IN GRAMS
SUGAR 18g
FAT 5.5g
SALT 1.37g

150g box of fish sushi (including rice, soy sauce and pickled ginger)
Sugar: 7.6g Fat: 2.2g Salt: 0.2g

Melissa's verdict: When it comes to sushi, sashimi – the raw fish – is healthier than sushi rolls.

SAINTLY SWAP: Team your sushi with a big seaweed salad and a nice side of edamame beans.

TOTAL IN GRAMS
SUGAR 7.6g
FAT 2.2g
SALT 0.2g

Regular brown bread BLT sandwich per pack
Sugar: 3.7g Fat: 13.5g Salt: 1.97g

60g dried mangoes
Sugar: 27g Fat: 0.2g Salt: 0g

Melissa's verdict: You may think dried mangoes are healthy but they're packed with sugar.

SAINTLY SWAP: Fresh fruit is always better.

TOTAL IN GRAMS
SUGAR 30.7g
FAT 13.7g
SALT 1.97g

Chicken korma and pilau rice meal for one
Sugar: 7.6g Fat: 27.2g Salt: 2.4g

Half a 300g pot of tarka dal
Sugar: 2.7g Fat: 6g Salt: 0.5g

One onion bhaji
Sugar: 1.7g Fat: 6.1g Salt: 0.36g

One 130g Peshwari naan bread
Sugar: 11.3g Fat: 9.2g Salt: 0.9g

TOTAL IN GRAMS
SUGAR 23.3g
FAT 48.5g
SALT 4.16g

Seven-inch pizza with pepperoni, hot green peppers and mozzarella (265g)
Sugar: 10.8g Fat: 24.4g Salt: 4.3g

1 heaped tbsp premium coleslaw
Sugar: 2.1g Fat: 12g Salt: 0.2g



DINNER



Two roast chicken drumsticks with the skin removed
Sugar: 0g Fat: 4g Salt: 2g

100g mixed-leaf salad
Sugar: 0.9g Fat: 0.2g Salt: 0g

200g baby Jersey Royal potatoes, boiled in the skins
Sugar: 1g Fat: 0.3g Salt: 0.03g

1 tsp olive oil
Sugar: 0g Fat: 5g Salt: 0g

1 tsp balsamic vinegar
Sugar: 1g Fat: 0g Salt: 0.3g

1 tbsp mayonnaise
Sugar: 0.2g Fat: 11g Salt: 0.2g

Melissa's verdict: Why buy ready-made spaghetti when you can cook it in 6 minutes?

SAINTLY SWAP: For more fibre, mix 4 to 5 tablespoons of cooked wholemeal pasta with a simple sauce made from a 200g can of passata, fried onions, mushrooms and peppers.

TOTAL IN GRAMS
SUGAR 6g
FAT 53.1g
SALT 4.07g

Spaghetti carbonara ready meal
Sugar: 4.4g Fat: 36g Salt: 3.3g

25g Parmesan
Sugar: 0g Fat: 7.1g Salt: 0.37g

Two slices of garlic cheese bread
Sugar: 1.6g Fat: 10g Salt: 0.4g

Melissa's verdict: Ready meals are full of sugar, which spikes your blood sugar levels – and because they're so refined, they're not nearly so satisfying. For an extra 14 minutes of cooking, you can have a proper meal if you're prepared.

SAINTLY SWAP: Ditch the rice for veg. Dal is easily made: fry onions then add coconut milk, raw broccoli and cauliflower, plus soya beans for extra protein. Simmer for 20 to 30 minutes. Your energy levels will soar, you won't be hungry and it's cheaper.

Individual steak and kidney pie (200g)
Sugar: 3g Fat: 25.6g Salt: 1.11g

165g chunky-cut oven chips
Sugar: 0.8g Fat: 6.2g Salt: 0.8g

100g steamed carrots
Sugar: 7.4g Fat: 0.3g Salt: trace

16g tomato ketchup
Sugar: 3.4g Fat: trace Salt: 0.3g

Melissa's verdict: The quality of the protein and nutrients here are very low and will increase cholesterol if eaten regularly. There may not be much sugar in this – but a huge amount of what you're eating is fat. With processed meat, you don't know where it comes from and it may be pumped full of hormones and antibiotics.

SAINTLY SWAP: Kidneys are best bought organic from the butcher.



SNACK ATTACK?

Two sticks of celery
Sugar: 0.7g Fat: 0.2g Salt: 0.1g

150g regular humous
Sugar: 0.75g Fat: 39.9g Salt: 1.5g

Melissa's verdict: This is a great combination. Humous contains olive oil, which increases the metabolism and is said to have anti-ageing properties.

TOTAL IN GRAMS
SUGAR 3.1g
FAT 20.5g
SALT 2.55g

TOTAL IN GRAMS
SUGAR 1.45g
FAT 40.1g
SALT 1.6g

DESSERT

100g slice of plain New York-style cheesecake
Sugar: 16.7g Fat: 25.8g Salt: 0.3g

Melissa's verdict: A sugar and fat minefield.

SAINTLY SWAP: Try oatcakes and a lower-fat, sour cream cheese like quark, topped with some chopped kiwi, passion fruit or cherries. Once you re-educate your taste buds this will seem quite indulgent.

TOTAL IN GRAMS
SUGAR 16.7g
FAT 25.8g
SALT 0.3g

Two meringues
Sugar: 24.6g Fat: 0g Salt: 0.08g

100g fresh raspberries
Sugar: 4g Fat: 1g Salt: 0.3g

30ml double cream
Sugar: 0.8g Fat: 14.3g Salt: 0.3g

Melissa's verdict: Meringues are fat free but full of sugar.

SAINTLY SWAP: Use silken tofu (it's very low in calories). Blend with the raspberries, add a sweetener like stevia and it will set to a mousse after 3 minutes in the fridge. Serve with crème fraîche.

TOTAL IN GRAMS
SUGAR 29.4g
FAT 15.3g
SALT 0.68g

150g rhubarb crumble pot
Sugar: 29.7g Fat: 11.6g Salt: 0.2g

100g ready-made fresh custard
Sugar: 10.5g Fat: 6.4g Salt: 0.1g

Melissa's verdict: Rhubarb is very low in sugar but that means it's sour, so we sweeten it.

SAINTLY SWAP: Make rhubarb purée and use stevia, not sugar, in the crumble. Baked cooking apples with a few raisins, cinnamon and a little honey would be even better. Treat custard like a condiment – have just a tablespoon.

TOTAL IN GRAMS
SUGAR 4.2g
FAT 18g
SALT 0.3g

SNACK ATTACK?



Two crumpets

Sugar: 4g Fat: 1.2g

Salt: 0.78g

7g unsalted butter

Sugar: 0g Fat: 5.5g

Salt: 0g

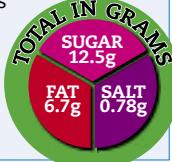
½ tbsp honey

Sugar: 8.5g Fat: 0g

Salt: 0g

Melissa's verdict: A lot of diet clubs recommend crumpets but the topping can tip the balance. Honey is just sugar.

SAINTLY SWAP: Try a thin spread of peanut butter or cream cheese.



200g creamed rice pudding

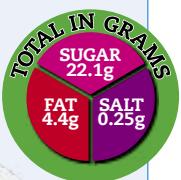
Sugar: 17.8g Fat: 4.4g Salt 0.25g

2 tsps strawberry jam

Sugar: 4.3g Fat: 0g Salt: 0g

Melissa's verdict: Jam is just sugar and anything sugary will only make you crave more of it. Have some fresh strawberries instead.

SAINTLY SWAP: A scoop of ice cream would have much less sugar.



Melissa's perfectly balanced meal:

My favourite breakfast – a mushroom and spinach frittata – doubles as a starter. Eggs are full of essential proteins and amino acids. To make your frittata, prepare an omelette mix, add onions, spinach and mushrooms then finish under the grill. For the main course, I'd suggest a large marinated chicken leg (see the recipe on page 28) with a salad, containing everything from asparagus to roasted curly kale. Slow-releasing carbs would come in the form of ¾ tablespoon of quinoa, wholemeal rice or lentils and chickpeas mixed into the salad. If you're really hungry, increase the protein with cottage cheese, an extra chicken leg or an egg in the salad. For a meat-free alternative, cook a vegetable chilli using kidney beans and chickpeas (both are full of

protein), onions, mushrooms and tinned tomatoes. Flavour with garlic, cumin and chilli then serve with a simple salad or a “rainbow” selection of veg.

The best pudding is always fresh fruit. Berries are very low in sugar and are now in season, so my choice would be a bowl of fresh strawberries with two dollops of Greek yoghurt on top.



Fats: unsaturated and saturated

There's evidence that unsaturated fats – found in oily fish, nuts and seeds, avocados and olive oil – are lower in cholesterol, while the saturated fats in animal and dairy products increase it. But don't be afraid of fat. Unlike sugar, which is just for energy, fat helps to build hormones. Every single membrane of our cells has fat and our brain is 60 per cent fat, so it is essential. A fat-free diet is also linked to increased hunger, which causes sugar cravings.

Sugar: fructose and glucose

Fructose, the kind that occurs naturally in fruit, is a better source of sugar because it's unrefined. But be warned – fructose goes straight to the liver rather than being stored as glycogen, which

the body can burn, so stick to two portions of fruit and one diluted glass of juice a day. To sweeten foods, use a sugar substitute such as stevia.

Salt and sodium

Salt – which is a major cause of high blood pressure – can easily be avoided. But as well as needing to watch for the salt we add to meals, we also need to monitor the salt that's already present in the food we buy. This includes the ones we buy for health reasons, such as smoked fish, olives, anchovies and fortified cereals. Salt is also known as sodium chloride, but sometimes manufacturers only give the figure for sodium, which will be less than the total salt content – 1g of sodium per 100g is equal to 2.5g of salt.

How to read food labels

- Labels on the backs of packaging tend to contain nutritional information per 100g, while labels on the front – used to make at-a-glance comparisons between products – usually give the nutritional details per serving (so it's best to check whether your idea of a serving corresponds with the manufacturer's).

- You will also find a Reference Intake chart on the front of packaging. Based on the recommended daily nutritional needs of an average-sized, moderately active woman, RI labels are usually colour-coded like traffic lights, so a red box indicates a high level of fat, salt, sugar etc. Amber means it has a medium content and green denotes a low level.

- Generally, if the first few ingredients in a list are healthy, low-fat ones, you can assume it's a safe choice. The more refined a food is, the more ingredients it has listed on the packaging.

- Foods can only be billed as “light” or “lite” when they contain at least 30% less of one particular value than the regular equivalent. But just because a food is lower in fat, it does not mean it's better for you – it could be higher in sugar and/or salt than the standard version. Similarly, “no added sugar” foods may still be high in natural sugar (as well as salt and/or fat).