

# 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

## How much is too much?

Government guidelines recommend 2,000 calories a day for women. In terms of sugar, salt and fat, this breaks down to the following limits:

**SUGARS:** A maximum of 90g per day  
**FAT:** A maximum of 70g – of which only 20% should be saturated  
**SALT:** A maximum of 6g (a teaspoon is approx 4g)

## How much per 100g?

**SUGAR:** More than 22.5g is high. Low is 5g or less per 100g  
**FAT:** Over 17.5g is considered high. Below 3g is said to be low fat  
**SALT:** High is anything above 1.5g, while 0.3g or less is considered to be low.

In the circular pie charts below, you'll find out how much salt, sugar and fat each meal contains. See page 31 for more on de-coding food labels – and information on the different types of fat, salt and sugar

## BREAKFAST

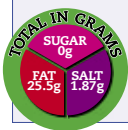
### Bacon & eggs: Four thin-cut rashers, grilled

Sugar: 0g Fat: 11.75g  
Salt: 1.41g

### 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.



### 55g instant oat porridge, made with water

Sugar: 5.4g Fat: 3.1g Salt: 0.3g

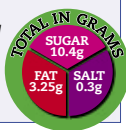
### 50g fresh blueberries

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.



### 30g corn flakes

Sugar: 2.4g  
Fat: 0.3g  
Salt: 0.38g

### 200ml whole milk

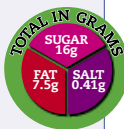
Sugar: 9.4g Fat: 7.2g Salt: 0.3g

### 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.



## LUNCH

### One plain bagel

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

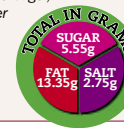
### 50g smoked salmon

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).

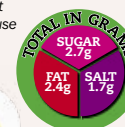


### 300g bowl of wild-mushroom soup

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.



### 210g reduced sugar and salt baked beans

Sugar 8g Fat 1.1g Salt 0.9g

### Two slices of medium-sliced granary bread

Sugar 2.4g Fat 1.8g Salt 0.74g

### 10g (2 tps) light olive spread

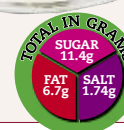
Sugar: 0g Fat: 3.8g Salt: 0.08g

### 5ml serving of Worcestershire sauce

Sugar: 1g Fat: 0g Salt: 0.2g

**Melissa's verdict:** There is very little protein content here – and is two bits of toast and half a can of beans really going to do it for you?

**SAINTLY SWAP:** You're better off with one piece of toast. Melt a low-fat mozzarella ball on the toast and put the beans on top.



## SNACK ATTACK?

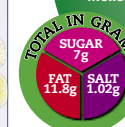
### Four all-butter Gruyère cheese twists

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.



### 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

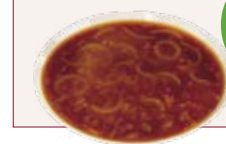
Sugar: 3.5g Fat: 0g Salt: 0.2g

**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.





**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.




**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.




**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.




**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

**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.




**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



**Melissa's verdict:** Pizzas can leave people sluggish because they're loaded with carbs, and pepperoni is a processed meat that is linked to carcinogens.  
**SAINTLY SWAP:** If you eat pizza regularly, opt for a protein topping like the classic spinach-and-egg Fiorentina, or cut the pizza in half and serve with a salad that includes chopped eggs and olives. Better still, make your own pizza with pitta bread, passata, chicken, tuna or mushrooms.




**DINNER**



**Two Cumberland sausages, grilled**  
 Sugar: 0.7g Fat: 27.5g Salt: 1.3g  
**Creamy mashed potato (half of a 450g shop-bought tray)**  
 Sugar: 1.6g Fat: 15.4g Salt: 1.09g  
**80g petit pois**  
 Sugar: 2.4g Fat: 0.7g  
 Salt: 0.1g  
**1 tsp English mustard**  
 Sugar: 0.6g Fat: 0.5g Salt: 0.43g

**Melissa's verdict:** You could have a similar, more nutrient-rich meal with far fewer calories and just as much flavour.  
**SAINTLY SWAP:** A healthy diet isn't all or nothing, so why not have one meat and one veggie sausage to decrease the saturated fat? Also, swap the potato for mashed chickpeas. To make your mash, fry some onion in olive oil, add half a pint of veg stock, cook the chickpeas in the stock for a couple of minutes, add parsley or garlic to taste and blend.

**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 says:** In my opinion, this is too boring for anyone to eat! Removing chicken skin is healthier, but having a little skin every now and then isn't going to be disastrous if your diet is generally healthy.  
**SAINTLY SWAP:** Marinate the chicken for a few minutes in olive oil, a little soy sauce and honey to make it sweet and sour then grill it for 15 minutes. Or simply rub it in some low-salt, low-sugar ketchup and olive oil.

**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:** 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.




**SNACK ATTACK?**

**Two sticks of celery**  
 Sugar: 0.7g Fat: 0.2g  
 Salt: 0.1g  
**150g regular houmous**  
 Sugar: 0.75g Fat: 39.9g Salt: 1.5g

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




**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.




**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.




**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.



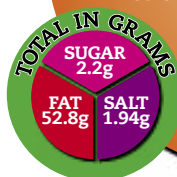

## SNACK ATTACK?

50g hand-cooked salt and cider vinegar crisps

Sugar 1.2g Fat 14.4g  
Salt 1g

85g taramasalata

Sugar: 1g Fat: 38.4g  
Salt: 0.94g



Melissa says: Taramasalata is high in fat – switch to humous for protein and unsaturated fat.

### Two crumpets

Sugar: 4g Fat: 1.2g  
Salt: 0.78g

7g unsalted butter

Sugar: 0g Fat: 5.5g  
Salt: 0g

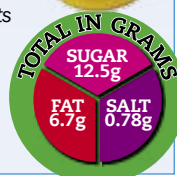
½ tbsp honey

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

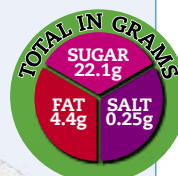
Sugar: 17.8g Fat: 4.4g Salt 0.25g

2 tps 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).