

# THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE YUMMY

Food, beverages and desserts that are deemed unhealthy and indulgent actually do have nutritional benefits – if taken in moderation or if made with healthier ingredients.

Text Jaclyn Reutens



PHOTO: DEPOSITPHOTOS/CHRISTOPHE ALLEN

**IF YOU CANNOT CONTROL THE QUALITY OF FOOD, YOU CAN ALWAYS CONTROL THE QUANTITY THAT YOU PUT INTO YOUR MOUTH.**



**I**f a dish is delicious and tasty, it must be unhealthy? True or false? False! Healthier food can be tasty, extremely tasty even. Truth be told, fattier food with more salt and seasonings do more for your palate and unfortunately for your waistline too. So the challenge is to find that balance where you can enjoy these sinful food without moving the belt buckle up a notch.

Local fare such as *hokkien mee*, *char kway teow*, fried rice will raise eyebrows if you say you are training for a marathon. These dishes cooked the traditional way will easily weigh in at about 700-800kcal a serve, 30 percent of which probably comes from lard, processed meats and fatty parts of the animal. Burgers, pies, pizza and other fast food contain huge amounts of sodium and saturated fat which are largely unhealthy.

Beverages such as cola drinks, canned drinks and cordials are made up of mainly sugar and no other nutrients. Yes, if you eat these food on a regular basis, you will not only hamper your performance but it puts you at risk of lifestyle medical problems such as diabetes, gout and coronary artery disease.

### The Key Is Control

The good news, however, is that a dish cannot be all bad, there must be some good in there somewhere. If you tease apart each dish and focus on each ingredient, you can be sure to find some nutritional benefits in some of the ingredients. The benefits could be anything from carbohydrate which gives energy, protein for muscle repair, vitamins for energy release, minerals for muscle contraction and fibre to stabilise blood sugar levels and regulate bowel movement, and healthy fats for storing vitamins and lubricating joints.

What would make the dish an unhealthy part of your diet is the amount that you eat. You have no excuse for food that are obviously greasy or laden with cream and sugar, these have to be consumed in smaller quantities. Therefore the key is portion control. If you cannot control the quality of food, you can always control the quantity that you put into your mouth.

With all dishes, you are able to modify the recipe to a healthier version without sacrificing too much on taste. You just need to know which ingredients to increase or decrease or remove completely. Let's have a closer look at some of these food:

### Make Good Out Of Bad

Hawker food are notoriously sinful and artery-clogging. Eating the entire plate of *char kway teow* at the hawker stall gives you loads of energy of which a substantial amount comes from fat, mainly saturated fat which we know is bad. However, it also provides carbohydrates, some protein and small amounts of fibre. The hidden nutrition benefit in this dish is actually the cockles! It provides a good source of iron and protein. Even so, cockles still cannot negate the amount of fat in that dish.

*Hokkien mee* is usually cooked with lard, and fatty bits of pork are seen through the noodle strands. After modifying the recipe to using lean pork, oil spray instead of lard and less seasonings, the dish lowers its calorie content and sodium by almost half. It then becomes a nutritious one-dish meal that also provides vitamin B, zinc, phosphorus and iron.

**Traditional fried rice** can be revamped by simply using brown rice and adding in



more vegetables. This easily doubles the fibre content and potassium while lowering the glycemic index which sustains energy longer.

**Pizza**, highly reputed as a no-no food can be both equally healthy and unhealthy depending on the toppings and thickness of crust. The healthier version would be topped off with pepperoni, salami, white sauce and no vegetables on a cheese-stuffed crust. The healthier one will be of a thinner crust and contains a form of lean protein such as chicken (breast), vegetables spread over tomato puree and finally topped with cheese. This is packed with antioxidants such as vitamin A, lycopene and capsaicin.

A **burger** with the works using the fattiest meat, greasy bacon, heavy mayo, added cheese on a buttered bun sings out for a heart bypass if you eat it often enough. Make it at home and you can enjoy a healthy burger that is low in fat and high in fibre and still be very tasty!

The nutritional value of a **sandwich** can swing from one extreme to another. If you use fillings with full fat mayonnaise such as egg or tuna mayo in between two slices of white bread, it will most certainly not meet the healthy criteria. However, using wholegrain bread,



## ENERGISE



**THE BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY LIES IN ALL OF US. IT IS THE DISCIPLINE THAT NEEDS TO BE ENFORCED. ALL FOODS SHOULD BE ENJOYED WITHOUT GUILT.**

low-fat fillings, calorie-free dressings and adding in salad vegetables will triple the nutritional value of that meal.

**Desserts** that are decadent contain high amounts of sugar, butter, and cream. The goodness in these food are that it can provide a good source of calcium, protein, fibre and vitamins A and C. Eating home-made pie can easily be part of a healthy diet. Learn to enjoy the natural taste of the ingredients without adding in copious amounts of sugar and butter.

**Sugary drinks** do have a role in a runner's diet but they have to be carefully included. Cordials and sweetened drinks give a quick boost to energy levels but the quantity must be considered to prevent a stomach upset.

As you can see, there is no one food that is totally bad. Make sensible choices when it comes to mealtime. The basic knowledge of what is healthy and unhealthy lies in all of us. It is the discipline that needs to be enforced. All food should be enjoyed without guilt. It boils down to the quality of ingredients and how much you devour. **R**

### THE BETTER, HEALTHIER ALTERNATIVES

If given a choice, you should make healthier swaps such as:

- Baked chicken fillets instead of chicken nuggets
- Frozen yoghurt instead of ice cream
- Baked potato instead of French fries
- Fresh fruit salad instead of cream cakes

### QUICK FACT

- Cook in a non-stick pan and use cooking oil spray. It uses only a fraction of oil from the normal recipe and this can easily save 200kcal.
- Where possible, use wholegrain carbs such as brown rice and wholemeal bread. This not only increases your fibre intake but also lowers the glycemic index of the entire dish.
- Vegetables are easily incorporated into recipes. Use different coloured vegetables to increase the anti-oxidant capacity of the dish.
- Highly processed meats such as sausages and bacon can be enjoyed occasionally, just limit the quantity and frequency of consumption.



## RECIPES

Serves:  
**1**

### LOW-FAT CHEESECAKE

#### Ingredients

2 whole low-fat cinnamon graham crackers  
 ½ tsp unsalted butter, melted  
 4 tbsp light Philadelphia cream cheese, softened  
 2 tbsp sugar  
 1 tbsp light sour cream  
 ¼ small egg  
 ¼ egg whites  
 ½ tsp all-purpose flour  
 ¼ tsp vanilla extract  
 ¼ tsp finely grated lemon zest

#### Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 175°C.
2. Crush the graham crackers until crumbled. Add 2 teaspoons water and butter to combine.
3. Press the crumbs onto the bottom of a baking pan. Blind bake until browned, about 8 minutes. Let cool, about 10 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, beat cream cheese and sugar with a mixer on medium-high speed until smooth, then beat in the sour cream on low.
5. Lightly whisk the egg whites in a bowl, then add to the cheese mixture along with the whole eggs, flour, vanilla and lemon zest.
6. Beat on medium speed until fluffy, 3 minutes. Pour over the crust.
7. Place the cheesecake in a baking pan. Bake until the cake is set. Turn off the oven; keep the cheesecake inside with the door closed for 20 minutes.
8. Remove the cake and transfer to a rack. Cool completely and chill until firm for at least 4 hours.

### NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	447
Protein (g)	10.8
Total Fat (g)	20.3
– Saturated Fat (g)	10.9
Cholesterol (mg)	85
Carbohydrate (g)	56.5
Dietary Fibre (g)	1.5
Sodium (mg)	512

## Serves: 1 **SHRIMP FRIED RICE**

### Ingredients

60g small prawns, raw, shelled and deveined  
40g squid, raw  
1/2 tsp cornstarch  
Canola oil spray  
1 small egg, beaten  
1/2 stalk green onions, minced  
1 cup cooked brown rice  
25g peas  
25g carrots  
1/2 tsp soy sauce  
1/2 tsp sesame oil  
Pinch of salt and pepper

### Directions

1. In a bowl, toss the prawns with the salt, pepper and cornstarch. Marinate for 10 minutes at room temperature.
2. Heat a non-stick pan on high heat. Spray oil onto pan.
3. Add the prawns, and fry until about 80 per cent cooked through. Remove from pan.
4. Turn the heat to medium, add the egg, stir to scramble the eggs. Remove from pan.
5. Clean the pan and return to high heat. Spray oil onto pan.
6. Add green onions and fry until fragrant.
7. Add in the rice and stir well to mix in the green onions.
8. Spread the rice and heat up until the grains sizzle. Drizzle with soy sauce and toss.
9. Add the peas, carrots, squid, the cooked egg, prawns and sesame oil. Toss to mix the rice evenly. Serve hot.

### NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	435
Protein (g)	29.5
Total Fat (g)	10.4
- Saturated Fat (g)	2.0
Cholesterol (mg)	243
Carbohydrate (g)	61.1
Dietary Fibre (g)	4.6
Sodium (mg)	371

## Serves: 1 **HEALTHY HAMBURGER**

### Ingredients

For the beef patties:  
100g ground sirloin  
1/4 whole egg  
2 tsp dried minced onion  
1/2 tsp Worcestershire sauce

### For The Burgers:

1/4 whole tomato, sliced thick  
1/4 cup lettuce leaves, chopped  
1/4 small onion, sliced thin  
1/2 tsp tomato sauce  
1/2 tsp mustard  
1 small whole wheat hamburger bun

### Directions

1. Preheat the grill. In a large bowl, mix the ground sirloin together with the egg, minced onion, and Worcestershire sauce.
2. Roll the meat mixture and press it between the palms of your hands, forming a patty.
3. Place the patty on the preheated grill, and cook for 7-8 minutes on each side, until the patty is completely cooked through and no longer pink in the middle.
4. Prepare the bun by spreading mustard and tomato sauce on each side of the bun.
5. Top with tomato slices, lettuce and sliced onion.
6. Place a hamburger patty on the bottom half of the bun, and then top with the top bun portion.

### NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	389
Protein (g)	30.4
Total Fat (g)	8.3
- Saturated Fat (g)	2.8
Cholesterol (mg)	99
Carbohydrate (g)	30.6
Dietary Fibre (g)	2.4
Sodium (mg)	424

## Serves: 1 **WHOLESOME APPLE PIE**

### Ingredients

2 tbsp dry rolled oats  
1 1/2 tsp whole-wheat pastry flour  
1 1/2 tsp ground almonds  
1/4 tsp brown sugar, packed  
1 tsp canola oil  
1/2 tsp water

### Filling:

1 small green apple, sliced and peeled  
2 tsp frozen apple juice concentrate  
1/4 tsp quick-cooking tapioca  
Cinnamon

### Directions

#### To Prepare Pie Crust:

1. Mix dry ingredients together in a large mixing bowl.
2. In a separate bowl, mix oil and water together with whisk.
3. Add oil and water mixture to dry ingredients.
4. Mix to form a dough. Add a bit more water if needed.
5. Press dough into pie plate. Set aside until filling is prepared.

#### To Prepare Filling:

1. Combine all ingredients in a large bowl. Let it stand for 15 minutes.
2. Stir and then spoon into prepared pie crust.
3. Bake at 220°C for 15 minutes.
4. Reduce heat to 175°C and bake until apples are tender.

### NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	206
Protein (g)	3.6
Total Fat (g)	9.8
- Saturated Fat (g)	0.8
Cholesterol (mg)	0
Carbohydrate (g)	26.6
Dietary Fibre (g)	4.1
Sodium (mg)	3.2

## Serves: 1 **LOW-CAL CLUB SANDWICH**

### Ingredients

2 slices fat trimmed bacon  
3 slices wholemeal bread  
3 tsp fat free mayonnaise  
3-4 romaine lettuce leaves  
4 medium slices tomato  
2 slices of low fat cheese  
Salt and pepper  
100g turkey breast, sliced thin

### Directions

1. Place skillet over medium-high heat. Add bacon and cook till crisp, about 5 minutes.
2. Toast bread until lightly toasted on both sides.
3. Spread mayonnaise on one slice of the bread, topped with lettuce, tomato and cheese. Season with salt and pepper. Add half of the turkey and bacon.
4. Repeat one more layer.
5. Place the last slice of bread on top of the sandwich.

### NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	445
Protein (g)	34.0
Total Fat (g)	15.5
- Saturated Fat (g)	4.5
Cholesterol (mg)	110
Carbohydrate (g)	29.5
Dietary Fibre (g)	5.4
Sodium (mg)	1206

## RECIPES

Serves:  
1FRIED  
KWAY TEOW

## Ingredients

50g cooked flat rice noodle  
50g cooked round yellow noodle  
50g medium-sized prawns, shelled with tail intact  
1 tbsp fresh cockles, shelled  
¼ Chinese sweet sausage (Lap Cheong), thinly sliced or cut into strips  
¼ fish cake, cut into strips  
¼ cup bean sprout, trimmed  
1 small egg

## Seasonings

¼ cloves garlic, minced  
¼ tsp sambal chili paste (optional)  
1 tsp fish sauce  
1 tsp light soy sauce  
1 tsp dark soy sauce  
1 tsp sugar  
1 tsp of tamarind juice (½ tsp tamarind paste mixed into 1 tsp of water)  
¼ tsp of water  
Canola oil spray  
1 tsp chives, cut into 2 inches long, lengthwise

## Directions

- Heat wok and spray with oil over high flame. Add garlic and stir-fry till fragrant.
- Add Chinese sausage and stir-fry till fragrant.
- Add in fish cake and prawns, and stir-fry till almost cooked. Reduce heat to medium fire, and move the ingredients to one side of the wok.
- Add sambal chili paste and stir-fry for 10 seconds. Then, add kway teow and yellow noodle into the wok, followed by water. Stir-fry noodles to combine well with chili paste.
- Add fish sauce, light soy sauce and dark soy sauce. Stir-fry vigorously to combine well.
- Scoop the noodles and other ingredients to one side of the wok, leave the centre of the wok empty.
- Spray oil into the centre of wok. When oil is heated, crack in egg and coat well with the noodles and other ingredients.
- Add sugar and stir-fry to combine. Then, add in tamarind juice and stir-fry again to combine well.
- Add in bean sprouts and chives and stir-fry for 10 seconds. Lastly, add in fresh cockles and stir-fry for just a few seconds.

## NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	411
Protein (g)	27.5
Total Fat (g)	17.2
– Saturated Fat (g)	4.2
Cholesterol (mg)	247
Carbohydrate (g)	36.7
Dietary Fibre (g)	2.9
Sodium (mg)	1074

Serves:  
1FRIED  
HOKKIEN MEE

## Ingredients

Canola oil spray  
1 clove garlic, minced  
30g lean pork slices  
30g prawns, peeled and deveined  
30g squid, cleaned and cut into rings  
¼ tsp fish sauce  
White pepper  
50g fresh yellow Hokkien egg noodles, soaked in hot water  
50g beehoon, soaked in hot water  
2 ½ tsp chicken stock  
50g bean sprouts  
¼ fishcake, sliced  
¼ small bunch Chinese chives, cut into short lengths  
Fried shallots for garnish

## Optional

Sambal Belacan  
Lime

## Directions

- Heat up a large wok and spray oil. Fry the garlic until golden brown and fragrant.
- Add the pork and fry until no longer pink. Then add the prawns and stir-fry until they turn pink.
- Add the squid and season with fish sauce and pepper.
- Stir-fry until the squid turns opaque.
- Remove all the ingredients from the wok and set aside.
- Add the noodles and the stock and bring to a boil. Simmer for 5 minutes, or until the noodles are cooked.
- Add the bean sprouts, fishcakes, and cooked ingredients. Stir-fry briefly to combine and heat through. Add the chives and toss.
- Sprinkle with fried shallots and serve hot with sambal belacan and lime.

## NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	360
Protein (g)	22.0
Total Fat (g)	12.8
– Saturated Fat (g)	3.2
Cholesterol (mg)	135
Carbohydrate (g)	34.2
Dietary Fibre (g)	4.4
Sodium (mg)	582

Serves:  
1BBQ CHICKEN  
VEG PIZZA

## Ingredients

1 medium thin commercially prepared pizza base (6 or 9 inch)  
80g raw chicken breast, chopped  
¼ cup chopped red, yellow, green bell peppers  
2 tbsp onion, chopped  
1 tbsp of tomato puree  
1 tsp BBQ Sauce  
2 tbsp grated Parmesan Cheese

## Directions

- Preheat oven at 175°C.
- Spread tomato puree over pizza base.
- Place chicken, bell peppers, onions evenly over it.
- Spread cheese over pizza, bake for 20 minutes.
- Drizzle BBQ sauce and serve.

## NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	348
Protein (g)	24.4
Total Fat (g)	10.6
– Saturated Fat (g)	4.2
Cholesterol (mg)	58
Carbohydrate (g)	38.7
Dietary Fibre (g)	2.2
Sodium (mg)	603