Info You Can Use

Fast food calorie count cheat sheet

Knowing your options when deciding where to eat is important, and with so many choices it can get overwhelming to track calories. NCHR compiled a list of common fast foods and their calorie counts so you can choose healthier options. For example, did you know that a regular French fry order from Five Guys is triple the calories of McDonald’s medium French fries? And that a whopper from Burger King has almost the same amount of calories as four slices of Domino’s pepperoni pizza? Read (and download) the full sheet "cheat sheet" here.

Is vaping safer than smoking cigarettes?

Electronic cigarettes, in the form of vape mods, Juuls, and vape pens, are marketed as the “safer” new alternative to conventional cigarettes. However, a 2023 study indicates that vaping can increase blood pressure and heart rate, and therefore may increase the risk of stroke. The researchers called for further studies looking at these risks.

Are the number of people harmed by vaping increasing? Since the CDC has not provided any data about that since 2020 (probably due to the pandemic), we can’t say. Prior to the pandemic, CDC research showed various health risks associated with vaping, such as lung damage and the increased chance of developing cancer. Updating this data is very important for public health. Read our article here.

Are plastic wrap and plastic containers safe?

Is it safe to warm up food in plastic
Containers or using plastic wrap in the microwave or the oven? Plastics break down over time, which means they can release small amounts of whatever chemicals they are made of into the food. This is more likely to happen when the plastic has been heated or when it's old and has been subjected to repeated use or washings. A 2023 study found that plastic containers that have PFAS (or 'forever chemicals') in them can transfer PFAS into the food stored in them. We need more research to know which plastics are safe—under what conditions and for what use. Until we have that information, you can reduce the amount of chemicals getting into your food from plastic by following the tips included in our article [here](#).

Are testosterone treatments safe and effective for men?

Frequently mentioned in advertisements, low testosterone, or low-t, has become an increasingly popular choice for men who want to feel young again. A study of more than 50,000 people found that patients taking testosterone therapy were more likely to develop serious heart issues. In addition, a 2023 study found that patients prescribed testosterone were 3 times more likely to tear their rotator cuff, showing that there might be a risk of muscle and bone injury when taking testosterone. These risks, along with unproven benefits, have raised questions about how safe and effective these therapies are. Read the full article [here](#).

Artificial sweeteners

One of the most popular no-calorie, sugar-free sweeteners in the US is Splenda, the brand name for sucralose. It is often added to coffee and tea, and is also in Diet Pepsi and some other soft drinks. Since 2014, evidence has shown that Splenda might not be so safe. In May 2023, the World Health Organization warned that artificial sweeteners, when consumed long term, do not reduce body fat in either adults or children, and could increase the risk of Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and mortality in adults. This recommendation applies to everyone, except individuals with diabetes, and includes all synthetic sweeteners such as aspartame, saccharin, sucralose, and stevia.

WHO also suggested that some artificial sweeteners, especially aspartame, can cause cancer. Although that was based on consuming very large quantities, that controversy will continue until better research is conducted. Read more about all the risks of artificial sweeteners [here](#).
How many free meals influence prescribing decisions?

The pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk spent $11 million on over 450,000 meals for thousands of doctors last year. This money was used to encourage doctors to prescribe Ozempic, and other weight loss drugs. Pharmaceutical companies are allowed to meet with doctors — often over lunch or coffee — to discuss their drugs. But we told STAT these amounts were outrageous. “It’s one thing to reach out to physicians and say ‘We’ve got these treatments and they’re so effective and we want you to know about them,’ I don’t think that’s ever going to explain over 100 meals,” said NCHR President, Dr. Diana Zuckerman. “You just have to laugh, it’s so crazy.” Research has shown that even gifts less than $20 can influence prescribing patterns. Read the STAT article here.

Alzheimer’s drugs update

New Alzheimer’s drugs such as Leqembi and Aduhelm are controversial because of safety concerns, limited benefits, high costs, and common side effects that include brain swelling and brain bleeding. To address the problem of unclear benefits and worrisome risks, Medicare announced they would cover new Alzheimer’s drugs that have traditional FDA approval for patients who participate in a registry. Leqembi was granted full approval by FDA on July 6. To receive coverage for Leqembi, doctors must enroll their patients in this registry to collect real-world data on how it works for Medicare patients. “The more information we have, the better position patients are in to make an informed decision about whether to try this,” Dr. Zuckerman told Bloomberg Law. Continuing to monitor these outcomes with the registry will be very important to understand how the treatment works among Black and other minority populations. Black Americans made up only 2.3% of the study population in Leqembi’s main clinical trial. Read the news article here.

Leqembi’s approved label includes a black box warning—the highest level of safety guidance issued by the FDA—to inform patients and prescribers about the common side effects, including the danger of swelling and bleeding in the brain. NCHR is glad this warning is present on the label. “We should all hope that physicians will take all these warnings seriously and spend time with their patients to make sure they understand what is known and not known about the risks as well as the benefits of this new drug,” said Dr. Zuckerman. Read the news article here.

Should FDA reform its Advisory Committees?

Why would a physician who received tens of thousands of meals to prescribe these drugs? As Dr. Zuckerman noted, the amounts were outrageous. Research has shown that even gifts less than $20 can influence prescribing patterns.
dollars from Eisai and Biogen over the last five years be allowed to participate in an "independent" FDA Advisory Committee review of a drug made by those companies? That almost happened for Leqembi, the recently approved Alzheimer’s drug! Fortunately, that physician, Dr. David Weisman, signed a letter from the Alzheimer’s Association urging the FDA to grant Leqembi approval. This letter was publicly available and resulted in complaints from other researchers when it was discovered that he was on the FDA’s Advisory Committee reviewing Leqembi.

Even after his removal from the Advisory Committee, the FDA stated it was just being extra careful. Dr. Zuckerman told Endpoints News, “The fact that FDA and Dr. Weisman apparently consider this a ‘potential’ conflict of interest, rather than an obviously outrageous conflict of interest, tells us that FDA needs to hire some bioethicists to help them vet Advisory Committee members.”

Weisman wasn’t the only one who signed the letter and was removed from the Advisory Committee at the last possible minute. It is wrong for the FDA to think any of these physicians were objective enough to serve on their Advisory Committee. Read the news article [here](#).

---

**We're Speaking Out for You**

**Why is FDA Ignoring their own scientists?**

NCHR and the Patient, Consumer, and Public Health Coalition also voiced their concerns with FDA Advisory Committees in a letter to the FDA Commissioner. Too often the leadership at FDA will influence approval decisions, even when it goes against the recommendation of their own scientists’. For example, FDA staff voiced concerns during an Advisory Committee meeting about a gene therapy called Elevidys, to treat Duchenne’s Muscular Dystrophy. Yet, an FDA Director, Peter Marks, told the Advisory Committee that the FDA should show flexibility by granting approval. This drug won approval on June 22. FDA decisions should support the FDA’s own scientific and statistical analyses presented in these meetings, and voting members should not be influenced by FDA staff or officials’ urging members how they should vote. Read our letter [here](#).

---

**Our comments on patients’ understanding of drug advertising**

In response to a request for public comments, NCHR provided several recommendations to the FDA on a survey they proposed to see if the public understands statistical comparisons used in drug advertising. We encouraged the inclusion of survey questions asking about the comprehension of complex scientific terms, such as relative risk, which can be used to exaggerate the benefit of a drug. We also urged the FDA to include a diverse group of participants in the one-on-one interview that will be used to create the survey and to provide details about how many interviews they plan to collect. Read our comment [here](#).

---

**Our comments on dental screening during primary**
Is there a health benefit to dental screening during yearly visits to your primary care physician? The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) reviewed research on this topic for both adults and kids. Unfortunately, existing research was limited to studies looking at dental care that was administered by dental professionals or in supervised school settings. There was little to no research for primary care settings. NCHR agreed with the recommendation of the USPSTF that more research is needed to understand the benefits for the primary care setting. Read our comments here and here.

News You Can Use

The lasting effect of thalidomide

In the 1950’s thalidomide was given to pregnant women in Europe for treatment of colds, headaches, and morning sickness. Over a decade later, it was recalled for causing infant deaths and severe birth defects in an estimated 10,000 children. In the U.S., the FDA’s first woman scientific reviewer, Frances Kelsey, refused to approve thalidomide despite pressure to follow in Europe’s footsteps, but some U.S. physicians were giving away free samples purporting to be conducting clinical trials. The FDA reported that only 17 Americans were harmed by the drug, but the number might be closer to 100-200. To learn more about what thalidomide survivors have to say read the full article here.

Blueberries may help lower your risk of cancer

In addition to being full of vitamins and nutrients, the small fruit might also help prevent cancer. According to dietitians, this known ‘superfood’ has high levels of antioxidants that help protect against cell damage that can eventually lead to cancer. In addition, blueberries are high in compounds called phytochemicals which give the fruit its color and flavor. These phytochemicals help to reduce inflammation, which can cause several different health problems. Research published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition suggests that eating one cup of blueberries daily can reduce the risk of heart disease, and other research suggests that consuming a little more than a cup of blueberries daily helps reduce blood pressure. Read about the full benefits of them here.

Follow Our Safe to Play Instagram!

Check us out!
Did you know that artificial turf and rubber playground surfaces contain chemicals that can cause attention problems, obesity, early puberty, asthma, and cancer? Are your children or grandchildren getting exposed when they play? Follow us @safe.to.play

@safe.to.play

Connect With Us!

National Center for Health Research
Facebook: @nationalresearchcenter
Twitter: @NC4HR

Cancer Prevention and Treatment Fund
Facebook: @CancerPreventionAndTreatmentFund
Twitter: @stopcancerfund

Donate

Your Contribution Can Make a Difference

We do not accept any funding from drug companies, device companies, chemical companies, or other sources that could influence our work and compromise our integrity. That's why so many people turn to us when they need help. Donations are tax deductible. Please consider giving to the National Center for Health Research online or by mail to the address below. You can also contribute to our Cancer Prevention and Treatment Fund online, by mail, or through the Combined Federal Campaign using CFC# 11967.

To sign up for these monthly updates, click here.