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July/August 2018

Summer Salad Tips

Summer is here and that means *bring on the salads!* When the temps rise outside, our bodies crave something cool, light and satisfying.

Salads can be low-calorie and offer lots of anti-inflammatory properties. The more color in your fruits and vegetables the better. The fiber they provide can help you feel full longer. Eating salads can be a great way to boost important nutrients into your diet. Just one serving per day can improve your levels of folic acid, vitamins C & E, lycopene, and carotenoids. And eating a large salad as a meal starter can reduce your overall calorie intake for that meal by 12%.

The word **salad** can sometimes be deceiving though. Did you know that a taco salad at a Mexican restaurant usually wins for most caloric item on the menu!? Before you hit the salad bar, consider that some of the topping options you'll find can spike your calorie count above a steak and baked potato!

Here's what to watch out for and why:

- Cheeses; While they're a good source of protein, they can also be high in calories. Feta is your best bet, but use sparingly.
- Croutons; Just a half cup contains as much as 100 calories and 247 mg of sodium. If you must have croutons, choose (or make your own) whole grain version.
- Bacon Bits; Skip these. Extremely high in sodium and fat. "Empty calories" that you don't need!
- Nuts and seeds; A good source of healthy fat and protein, but watch your portions, these calories add up fast!
- Olives; A low-calorie choice that's high in sodium. Go for the green ones, they have the least amount of sodium.
- Creamy dressings; Replacing creamy dressings, such as ranch or blue cheese, with a non-creamy Italian or balsamic vinaigrette practically cuts your calories in half!

Build a salad that's loaded with fresh greens, raw or cooked vegetables, in-season fruits, beans, and lean proteins like chicken or turkey. Top it with a few sunflower seeds for crunch. Instead of buying salad dressings at the store, try making your own healthy version. Or replace the dressing altogether, with cottage cheese or salsa, to up your protein and/or veggie intake.

Classic Dijon Vinaigrette: 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil + 1/4 cup red wine vinegar + 1 tsp. Dijon mustard + 1/2 tsp. salt + 2 tsp. minced shallots.

Refrigerate up to one week.