



Cut Unwanted Calories out of your Picnic – not the Fun!

Kim Gorman, MS, RD

University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center

Now that warmer weather and blue skies are here, many of us are out enjoying the summer time tradition of relaxing outdoors with good company and a delicious picnic. It couldn't be a better time to create unforgettable memories with your family and friends over a great meal. But, these memorable times should be filled with fun, not excess calories.

Picnics often include high calorie foods that we crave, but that doesn't mean cutting out favorite foods, instead focus on portion control. It's a simple energy balance equation of calories in versus calories out. Keep in mind that each gram of fat contains nine calories while grams of protein and carbohydrate have only four calories.

With a little planning, you can enjoy a picnic without compromising enjoyable moments or your waistline. Here are a few healthy tips to help you breeze through the picnic season:

Tip 1: Reduce your "typical" serving size by half if it's a high-fat food item and pack healthy, low-calorie foods.

Instead of trying to put together a complete menu that will appeal to everyone, fill your picnic basket with a variety of good, light choices to ensure there are healthy choices available to eat while socializing. It's easier than you think and you'll feel good about the selections you've made.

You'll win by packing any of the following healthy, low-calorie options: whole and/or enriched grain breads, rolls, pita, tortilla wraps, pretzels, crackers and baked chips with salsa; fresh fruits & vegetables, bean casseroles in a vinegar base and grilled boneless skinless chicken,. Don't forget, the lowest calorie beverages, of course, are water, diet sodas and sugar-free flavored drinks.

Tip 2: Fill half of your plate with fruits, vegetables and all grains (whole & enriched).

This is a great way to cut calories and get your nutrients for the day. Fruits and vegetables including blueberries, grapes, citrus fruits, carrots, tomatoes, broccoli and spinach provide many antioxidant nutrients and fiber that benefit the heart and may help reduce the risk for different types of cancer. Grain foods are also an excellent source of antioxidants, having as many antioxidants as most vegetables and some fruits. Enriched (white) grains are fortified with folic acid (a form of folate) to help prevent neural tube birth defects and has been linked to preventing heart disease, cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

Try smaller meat servings like kabobs or chicken tender strips – these are a great way to keep a lid on the saturated fat. Also, try summertime desserts such angel food cake with strawberries, graham cracker-peanut butter sandwiches, sugar-free popsicles, frozen yogurt and sugar-free gelatins with fruit and fat-free toppings.

Tip 3: Break away and get some exercise!

Plan for some activity during the day –Kickball, bocce, softball, frisbee and badminton are some great ways to get everyone involved, burn extra calories and have fun. Now get outside — and don't forget the napkins and utensils.