



Discretionary Calories⁴

Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

Why shouldn't I bring sweet treats for a classroom celebration?

Discretionary calories are the calories left after meeting nutrient requirements from healthy foods that help our children grow, learn, and stay healthy. This "leftover" amounts to only about 10% of total calories, or about 150 calories per day for a young child. They are most often consumed as "empty calories" in items high in solid fats and added sugars that lack vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, protein, and fiber. Some parents would like their children to use them for... a lot of extra fruit or vegetables ... a little extra nutrient-rich milk, meat, or bread...oil to fry a food... a dessert at a family occasion. Supplying discretionary calorie treats at school or activities removes parental choice in discretionary calorie use. Let's leave these calories to the "discretion" of each family to use outside of the school day.

Nutrition Philosophy

During Student School Day

School meals are the main source of nutrition. Snacks are to:

1. Supplement the meal
2. Help, not hinder, students' nutrition
3. Provide serving size and calories based on age and activity

Discretionary calories can be used under the guidance of parents at home.

* See Appendix 6 on discretionary calories

1. Age and Sex	2. Not Physically Active		3. Physically Active ¹		4. Based on NHANES 1999-2002 data ²
	Estimated Total Calorie Need	Estimated Discretionary Calorie Allowance	Estimated Total Calorie Need	Estimated Discretionary Calorie Allowance	Average Daily Discretionary Calories Consumed ²
Children 4-8 years old	1200-1400 calories	170	1400-1800 calories	170-195	719
Girls 9-13 years old	1600 calories	130	1600-2200 calories	130-290	810
Boys 9-13 years old	1800 calories	195	1800-2600 calories	195-410	
Girls 14-18 years old	1800 calories	195	2000-2400 calories	265-360	946
Boys 14-18 years old	2200 calories	290	2400-3200 calories	360-650	

Column 4 in the above chart shows that about 40% of calories children consume are from discretionary foods and beverages that lack nutrients needed for healthy growth. *The Discretionary Calories Consumed can be reduced to the Calorie Allowance by cutting portion size and use of those items, and replacing them with nutrient-rich, healthy foods.*

For better health, use Estimated Discretionary Calorie Allowance (columns 2 and 3 above) to:

- *Eat larger portions of nutrient-rich foods like fruit and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, and lean protein sources.
- *Eat occasional portions of higher calorie forms of nutrient-rich foods that contain some solid fats and/or added sugars, such as sweetened cereals, flavored milk, 2% milk, or regular cheese,.
- *Add small amounts of fats or sweeteners to foods, such as 1-2 teaspoons gravy, salad dressings, syrup, and butter.
- *Eat or drink infrequent small amounts of items that are mostly fats & caloric sweeteners, such as candy, soda, and other sugar-added beverages.

1. These amounts are appropriate for individuals who get at least 30 minutes (lower calorie level) to at least 60 minutes (higher calorie level) of moderate physical activity most days.
2. Institute of Medicine. 2010. *School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children*. p51. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press
3. Chriqui, JF, et al. *Bridging the Gap*, Health Policy Center, University of IL at Chicago, 2009.
4. Based on http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/discretionary_calories_amount.html
5. Johnson, RK. *The American Heart Association dietary sugars intake and cardiovascular health: a scientific statement*. *Circulation*. 2009; 120: 101101020.

How do I know what foods and beverages have high solid fat and added sugar discretionary calories?

Read food ingredient labels for the first, or most predominant, ingredients. Also look for the grams of saturated fat and of sugar on the nutrient label to see if a high percentage of the calories come from those sources. Remember to check calories in one serving. There may be more than one serving in a package. Stick with one serving or less.

“Solid Fat”: fat that is solid at room temperature, like butter and shortening. Solid fat come from many animal foods and can be made from vegetable oils through a process called hydrogenation. This “saturates” them so we refer to them as saturated fat on labels. There should be less than 10% of calories from saturated fat to be a healthier item. Use higher saturated fat items sparingly.

Sources of solid fat include:

- Butter
- Beef fat (tallow, suet)
- Chicken fat
- Pork fat (lard)
- Stick margarine
- Shortening
- Creams



Food high in solid fat include:

- Many types of pizza
- Many cheeses
- Ice cream
- Well-marbled cuts of meats
- Regular ground beef
- Bacon
- Sausages, pepperoni
- Poultry skin
- Baked goods such as donuts, pastries, cookies and croissants

“Added Sugar”: sugars and syrups added to foods or beverages during processing or preparation. We get far more than we need. The average American takes in around 22 teaspoons of sugar daily. This equals 355 calories. The highest sugar intake is among 14-18 year olds, who consume 34 teaspoons sugar per day for 549 calories. The American Heart Association⁵ recommends no more than 100 calories (6 tsp)/day for American women and no more than 150 calories (10 tsp)/day for American men from added sugars. Strive for less added sugars in all age groups for health’s sake!

Names for added sugars on food labels include:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| • brown sugar | • glucose | • molasses |
| • corn sweetener | • high-fructose | • invert sugar |
| • corn syrup | • corn syrup | • sugar |
| • dextrose | • honey | • syrup |
| • fructose | • maltose | • raw sugar |
| • fruit juice concentrates | • malt syrup | |
| • lactose | | |

Discretionary Foods high in solid fats and added sugars most consumed during the school day³:

- Juice drinks/sport drinks/thirst quenchers/carbonated soda
- Cookies, cakes, and brownies
- Candy
- Chips



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