

Choose cloudy apple juice if you want extra antioxidants, as it contains four times more than the clear varieties.

Berkeley Wellness Letter.

TASTE TREK

Basil

A member of the mint family, with a wonderful aroma and taste, basil is often eaten in much higher quantities than other herbs and can therefore provide more nutritional value.

High in iron, calcium, potassium, and vitamin C, basil also offers smaller quantities of vitamin A, magnesium, and manganese. Being a plant food, basil also has no cholesterol or fat, and little energy (kilojoules).

With its name deriving from the Greek word meaning 'king' or 'royal' it's little wonder basil is highly rated not only for its culinary delights, but its many suspected health benefits.

Useful for aiding digestion and calming the nervous system, basil is also said to effectively treat colds and flu; act as an anti-inflammatory and improve arthritic conditions; boost blood circulation and help prevent heart disease; protect against cell damage and oxidation; and even relieve migraines.

The only problem with basil is working out which type to use for which style of cooking!

Sweet basil is most popular in Italian and Mediterranean dishes, especially tomato-based dishes, and as the chief ingredient in the popular 'pesto' sauce; while Lemon basil, and the Opal or purplish varieties (often called Thai basil) are particularly suited to Thai and Vietnamese style dishes.

Fresh leaves are the best source of nutrients, and will add more zing to your daily diet. Try these ideas:

- Include a bunch of basil leaves in your favourite salad, sprinkle them on home-made pizza, or include them as a sandwich filling.
- Add a bunch of torn basil leaves in the final stages of cooking tomato-based dishes, stir-fried meat or vegetable dishes, or your favourite soup or stew.

Sources: helpwithcooking.com; and The Herb Society of America.

LIQUID GAINS

If you're trying to maintain your weight, or lose a few kilos, be sure to watch what you're drinking during the day.

A quick mental calculation of the food you've eaten today should give you a rough idea of how you're travelling with your kilojoule count, right? Wrong!

You may have cut back on cookies, banished chocolate from sight, and chosen a healthy salad roll for lunch, but what about those drinks you've consumed? The large cappuccino on your way to work, that banana smoothie with lunch, even the healthy fruit juice to counteract your mid-afternoon slump?

All of these beverages pack a hefty punch with their energy load, but unfortunately don't fill you up. However many kilojoules they provide (and in many cases it's considerable), they're nowhere near as satisfying as the energy-equivalent food. This means that after drinking them to quench your thirst, you end up eating just as much as usual.

While the worst culprits have been identified as sugary soft drinks and fruit drinks, all forms of alcohol, large and flavoured coffees and teas, and super-sized smoothies and juices are also considered guilty.

Suitable swaps

Water is the best drink for hydration, and comes with zero kilojoules. But if you do want a change from water, make wiser beverage choices in the following ways:

1. Coffee and tea. Some super-sized flavoured coffees and teas can contain added extras such as cream and sugar, delivering as many kilojoules as there are in a small meal.

A regular sized cafe latte made with skim milk is a comparatively skinny 335kJ, while if you make your own mug of tea or coffee with semi-skimmed milk, your kilojoules drop to 113.

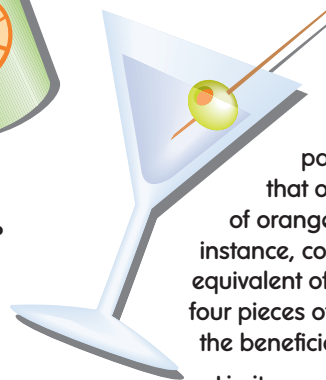
2. Juices.

While juices are far more nutritious than soft drinks, it pays to be aware that one 250mL glass of orange juice, for instance, contains the equivalent of about three to four pieces of fruit, without the beneficial fibre.

Limit yourself to around 120mL juice a day, and dilute it with still or sparkling water. Vegetable juices are lower in kilojoules, but some are high in sodium. Keep smoothies (usually made from full-fat milk coupled with juiced fruit and other ingredients) as a special treat, as they are particularly energy dense.

3. Alcohol. One 200mL glass of wine, a can of beer, and a nip of liqueur each deliver around 500kJ. Cola and other mixers will add to the energy load, so opt for low-kilojoule mixers, dilute your wine with sparkling water, or alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

Main sources: timesonline.co.uk; and Good Health and Medicine magazine.



The Secret of Soup

It's a well-known fact that liquids will quench your thirst, but won't satisfy you in the same way foods do. This rule, however, does not apply to soup.

Studies have repeatedly shown that when people have a bowl of soup prior to their meal, they end up consuming less food and fewer total kilojoules than those who skip the soup and eat only the meal.

It all comes down to the fact that some foods are low in energy density, with fruit

and vegetables topping the list. Low energy density means that for its weight, the food delivers relatively few kilojoules.

Soup is high in both fibre and water, providing a high bulk dish that's low in kilojoules, fills up the stomach, and takes more time to digest. It allows you to feel full for longer and so avoid over-eating, which also makes it a perfect mid-morning or afternoon snack.

Main source: Mayo Clinic at mayoclinic.com.