



August 13, 2008

How to not ditch your diet

STAFF REPORT

Can't resist the urge to bite into a juicy steak or chow down on a cheeseburger straight off the barbecue? These summer indulgences might make us giddy, but they also can make us feel guilty.

Believe it or not, there is a healthy eating plan that can help satisfy your cravings without expanding your waistline. Sari Greaves, a registered dietitian at Step Ahead Weight Loss Center in Bedminster and a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association, offers five of the biggest party pitfalls and how to avoid them:

Arriving to a barbecue starving

If you are starving, you are more likely to eat fast and impulsively, instead of selecting foods based on nutritional value. This can lead to calorie overload. For example, just 1 ounce of potato chips (17 chips) and 2 tablespoons of ranch dip adds up to 200 calories and 16 grams of fat, and that's before the main course.

Practice damage control. Eat a small low-fat snacks such as fruit or low-fat yogurt before you head to a summer barbecue. This will help you avoid rushing to the buffet table when you arrive.

Grilling the wrong foods

While it is true outdoor grilling allows excess fat in meat and poultry to drip away, it is worth keeping certain foods off the grill because of their high calorie, saturated fat and sodium content. The culprits: regular ground meats, dark-meat poultry with skin, beef short ribs (just 3 ounces has 330 calories and 31 grams fat), pork spareribs and sausages (1 link of bratwurst has 281 calories and 25 grams fat).

Grill lean cuts of meat, choose white-meat chicken over dark, don't shy away from adding seafood to the grill and prepare veggie kebabs using cubes of firm tofu on a skewer with your favorite fruits and vegetables.

Drinking too much soda or juice

Soda isn't the only culprit that can add extra calories to your barbecue meal. Fruit drinks, alcohol and other sugar-laden beverages — sweetened teas and vitamin-enhanced water included — are just as fattening.

Eat fruit, rather than drink it. Whole fruits not only contain the vitamins and minerals found in fruits, but they are filled with fiber. Fiber adds bulk to your diet, helping you feel full on fewer calories. If you love juice, downsize your portion to 4 to 6 ounces daily.

Try diet sodas and other diet drinks, such as Crystal Light, that have 5 or fewer calories per serving and are ideal for increasing your beverage options while minimizing intake of added sugar.

Drink nonfat or 1 percent milk. Drinking milk as a protein source can help prevent loss of muscle mass and promote fullness for individuals trying to lose weight. Soy milk also is a healthy option.

Avoid or limit alcohol consumption; instead, try a sparkling water with a twist of lime. If you drink alcohol, practice moderation.

Grazing and picking

These quick bites easily can lead to overeating. So put your meal on a plate. Use small plates as a built-in way to control your portions. Bring a healthy dish to a summer party. Mixed-fruit salad or a spinach salad drizzled with olive oil and vinegar are simple to prepare and easy to carry.

Other nutritious pot-luck contributions include shrimp cocktail or vegetables with low-fat bean dip or hummus.

Assuming all salads are healthy

People can overload their salad with loads of calories with ingredients such as fried chicken, fatty dressing, cheese cubes, croutons, bacon bits or fried wontons. So add fruits and vegetables to your salad. Think beyond iceberg lettuce. Take advantage of dark leafy greens that are loaded with nutrients such as vitamin C, beta carotene, folate, calcium, fiber and potassium — all for only 25 calories per cup.

Add protein. Grilled skinless chicken breast, salmon, cubed tofu or flank steak hot and fresh off the barbecue serve as low-fat protein sources. Low-fat shredded cheese and legumes — beans, peas and lentils — also add a protein punch.

Don't give up all fats and flavor. A few avocado slices, a sprinkle of nuts or seeds, or a tablespoon of hummus help satisfy your appetite and taste buds.

Don't dress to kill. If there's a dressing that you love, try a light variety, use 1 tablespoon instead of 2 and dilute it with vinegar.

More information about Step Ahead Weight Loss Center — located at 1 Robertson Drive, Suite 27, Bedminster — is available by calling 908-470-2235.
