

Red alert!

THREE LITTLE INGREDIENTS—
CORN SYRUP, KETCHUP AND
CHEWING GUM—CAN RUIN
YOUR WEIGHT-LOSS PLANS.

BY LEAH McLAUGHLIN

Q “I know ketchup is high in lycopene. What other condiments are good for me?”

A Chutneys are made from antioxidant-packed fruits like apricots and cranberries, hummus offers low-fat protein and fiber, and mustard contains immune-boosting zeaxanthin. “However, try to limit yourself to just a tablespoon or two of each of these, since they do still have calories,” says Elisa Zied, R.D., author of *So What Can I Eat?* (Wiley, 2006). As for ketchup, we had high hopes during that whole “it’s a vegetable” debate back in the eighties, but “unfortunately, while it does contain lycopene, ketchup isn’t the best source, since it’s also full of sugar,” says Lisa Young, R.D., Ph.D., author of *The Portion Teller* (Doubleday Books, 2005). A healthier source? Salsa.

Q “I work out five days a week and eat less than 1,400 calories a day, but I’m not losing weight. What gives?”

A Are you sure about that calorie count? “You’d be surprised how common it is to underestimate how much you’re really eating,” says Young. Write down everything that goes into your mouth for a week, then calculate the calories using a standardized nutritional database like ars.usda.gov/foodsearch. If you really are getting fewer than 1,400 calories per day, you may actually need to increase your intake. “Skimping can slow your metabolism,” says Zied. Based on your high level of activity,

you may require as many as 2,200 calories a day (so eat up, girlfriend!). “To safely lose a pound a week, subtract 500 from that for a total intake of 1,700 per day,” recommends Zied.

Q “I keep seeing high fructose corn syrup as an ingredient in the foods I buy. Should I stay away from it?”

A That would be difficult. High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is a very common sweetener, composed of about 55 percent fructose and 45 percent glucose—in other words, just another form of sugar, explains Zied. It isn’t necessarily harmful; the main problem with HFCS is that it’s often found in high-calorie foods that are otherwise devoid of nutrients. “Some research shows a connection between HFCS-laced beverages and weight gain, but there’s still no solid proof,” says Milton Stokes, R.D., chief dietitian at St. Barnabas Hospital and Nursing Home in New York City and a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. Consider the overall healthfulness of foods—their fat, calorie, fiber and vitamin content—rather than obsessing about a single ingredient.

Q “Since I stopped smoking a year ago, I’ve become a chewing gum addict. Should I be worried about the calories in gum?”

A Gum can have up to 15 calories per piece, and kicking nicotine can cause a 200-calorie-per-day drop in metabolism. “However, chewing is certainly better than smoking,” says Stokes. “Just choose sugarless to keep your dentist happy.” To stem weight gain, cut 100 calories from elsewhere in your diet.

Q “Does wheat germ count as a whole grain?”

A Surprise—it doesn’t. “To be a whole grain, the food must also retain the plant’s bran and endosperm, not just the germ,” explains Stokes. But that doesn’t mean you should stop eating it. The wheat berry’s germ happens to be a concentrated source of vitamins and minerals, such as folic acid, vitamin E and magnesium, says Young. It also provides two grams of protein and one gram of fiber per tablespoon. Sprinkle it on cereal or yogurt, or add it to baked goods and casseroles to lend a nutty flavor. ♦

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