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ReFresh: If You're Going to Cheat

Summer is just around the corner and perhaps you are watching your fat and calorie intake to better fit into your shorts or swimsuit!

We know that a regular healthy diet, comprised of vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, and low-fat proteins, is central to a healthy lifestyle. But it's okay to treat yourself once in a while! If you are going to 'cheat' on your healthy diet, then indulge yourself in these best 'junk foods' that are, technically, healthy.

- **Dark chocolate** – This treat is full of antioxidants linked to health benefits such as decreased inflammation (even more effective than blueberries!), reduced risk factors for heart disease, and it is high in iron and fibre. Aim for chocolate that is 70% cocoa.
- **Ice pops** - While fruit ice pops have sugar, they do not usually have fat. *Popsicle* brand ice pops have only 40 calories per serving. Or, you can save money and make this treat healthier when you make your own with your favourite fruit juices. For example, orange juice ice pops provide you with vitamins C and A, folate, potassium, and magnesium!

[Click here](#) for the latest and greatest in ice pop molds!

- **Frozen yogurt bars or yogurt pops** - These frozen treats contain yogurt as well as healthy ingredients such as fruit and honey. Yogurt is especially high in calcium, B vitamins, and trace minerals. It contains good bacteria that help prevent certain infections and boost the immune system. Yogurt is an effective way to keep your digestive system in good working order. Try [these](#).

- **Popcorn** - Air-popped and lightly seasoned popcorn is an efficient and healthy snack. It is among the whole grain, high-fibre foods that are linked to a lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. Popcorn is also a good source of polyphenols, antioxidants that have been associated with better blood circulation and digestive health, and a potentially lower risk of certain cancers. Another bonus: due to the high fibre content, eating popcorn makes you feel full!

But: *beware of movie and microwave popcorn*. A tub of theatre popcorn can contain up to 1,090 calories and 2,650 milligrams of sodium. Caramel popcorn is also high in fat and sugars. Stick to homemade popcorn and add your own healthy toppings, such as:

- Chili powder and lime zest
 - Curry powder and cayenne
 - Parmesan, garlic, and black pepper
 - Tomato powder and oregano
 - Cinnamon and cocoa powder
- **Sweet potato fries** – While the calories and carbs in sweet potato fries are similar to regular fries, they are high in fibre and antioxidants which protect your body from free radical damage and promote a healthy gut and brain. They are also incredibly rich in beta carotene, which is converted to vitamin A to support good vision and your immune system.
 - **Angel food cake** – This light, fluffy dessert does not contain fat. It is made from whipped egg whites, which are beneficial for your body. Add some fruit on top and you have a healthy, after-dinner delight! Try [this recipe](#).
 - **Oatmeal cookies** - If cookies are your thing, reach for the oatmeal variety. Oats are a healthy, whole-grain food high in fibre and minerals like iron and calcium. For additional health benefits, choose or make ones with nuts and dried fruits, as they are rich in fibre, protein, and vitamins. [Make your own](#) (and add some dark chocolate chips!)
 - **Zucchini bread** – This moist dessert – that pairs well with tea – contains a high amount of vitamin C, vitamin B6, and potassium. Making your own and controlling the ingredients helps increase the health value and decrease the calories and fat. To lower the fat content in your bread, select recipes that include yogurt or buttermilk, and avoid using oil. [Get baking](#) (includes vegan options!)

- **Tortilla chips and salsa** - Buy some tortillas at your local supermarket, then cut them up and bake them – instructions [here](#). There are many salsa recipes online – [here is one](#) for quick, easy access.
- **Candy apples** - Candy apples, whether coated with caramel or a hard candy shell, are much more nutritious than plain old candy. The health benefits of apples are incredible: apples are a good source of fibre and vitamin C, and contain antioxidants, like vitamin E, and polyphenols. Apples help prevent diabetes, some cancers, and heart disease.
- **Ice cream** - Saving the best for last – at least from my perspective and that of my high school gym teacher! – ice cream has some beneficial nutrients, such as protein and calcium, which are great for your health. Some brands make their product with a higher amount of vitamin B and probiotics. Unless you overindulge, ice cream can be a healthy food for you.

And finally, if you have to eat out, here is some information on the healthiest fast-food options to help you make informed decisions!

<https://globalnews.ca/news/3747078/this-is-what-nutrition-experts-would-order-at-a-fast-food-restaurant/>

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.