

Discretionary Calories

Adapted from USDA's MyPyramid.gov

What are discretionary calories?

You need a certain number of calories to keep your body functioning and provide energy for physical activities. Think of the calories you need for energy like money you have to spend. Each person has a total calorie "budget." This budget can be divided into "essentials" and "extras."

With a financial budget, the essentials are items like rent and food. The extras are things like movies and vacations. In a calorie budget, the "essentials" are the minimum calories required to meet your nutrient needs. By selecting the lowest

fat and no-sugar-added forms of foods in each food group, you would make the best nutrient "buys." Depending on the foods you choose, you may be able to spend more calories than the amount required to meet your nutrient needs. These calories are the "extras" that can be used on luxuries like solid fats, added sugars, alcohol, or more food from any food group. They are your "discretionary calories."

Each person has an allowance for some discretionary calories. But many people have used up this allowance before lunch! Most discretionary calorie allowances are very small, between 100 and 300 calories, especially

for those who are not physically active. For many people, the discretionary calorie allowance is totally used by the foods they choose in each food group, such as higher-fat meats, cheeses, whole milk, or sweetened bakery products.

You can use your discretionary calorie allowance to:

- Eat more foods from any food group than the food guide recommends.
- Eat higher calorie forms of foods — those that contain solid fats or added sugars. Examples are whole milk, cheese, sausage, biscuits, sweetened cereal, and sweetened yogurt.
- Add fats or sweeteners to foods. Examples are sauces, salad dressings, sugar, syrup, and butter.
- Eat or drink items that are mostly fats, caloric sweeteners, and/or alcohol, such as candy, soda, wine, and beer.

For example, assume your calorie budget is 2,000 calories per day. Of these calories, you need to spend at least 1,735 calories for essential nutrients, if you choose foods without added fat and sugar. Then you have 265 discretionary calories left. You may use these on "luxury" versions of the foods in each group, such as higher fat meat or sweetened cereal. Or you can spend them on sweets, sauces, or beverages. Many people overspend their discretionary calorie allowance, choosing more added fats, sugars, and alcohol than their budget allows.



What are added sugars?

Added sugars are sugars and syrups that are added to foods or beverages during processing or preparation. This does not include naturally occurring sugars such as those that occur in milk and fruits.

Reading the ingredient label on processed foods can help to identify added sugars.

Names for added sugars on food labels include:

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



Foods that contain most of the added sugars in American diet:

Regular soft drinks, candy, cakes, cookies, pies, fruit drinks, ice cream, sweetened yogurt, sweetened milk, sweet rolls, and cinnamon toast.

What are solid fats?

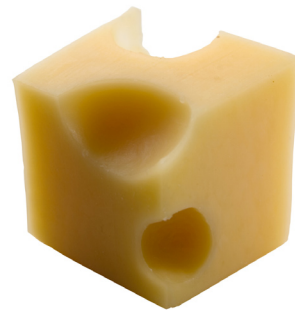
Solid fats are fats that are solid at room temperature, like butter and shortening. Solid fats come from many animal foods and can be made from vegetable oils through a process called hydrogenation.

Some common solid fats are:

Butter, beef fat (tallow, suet), chicken fat, pork fat (lard), stick margarine, and shortening.

Foods high in solid fats include:

- many cheeses
- creams
- ice creams
- regular ground beef
- bacon
- sausages
- poultry skin
- well-marbled cuts of meats
- many baked goods (such as cookies, crackers, donuts, pastries, and croissants)



How are solid fats different from oils?

Solid fats contain more saturated fats and/or *trans* fats than oils. Oils contain more monounsaturated (MUFA) and polyunsaturated (PUFA) fats. Look for foods that are low in saturated fats, *trans* fats and cholesterol. *Trans* fats can be found in many cakes, cookies, crackers, icings, margarines, and microwave popcorns. Foods containing partially-hydrogenated vegetable oils usually contain *trans* fats.