

Foods with negative calories? ^[1]

(1) Dear Alice,

Which foods, if any, have negative calories?

(2) Dear Alice,

I have recently started a weight loss plan and after doing some research I learned about calorie burning foods. My question is, are there really calorie burning foods or is it just another diet fad?

Answer

Dear Readers,

Negative-calorie or calorie-burning foods may sound magically delicious. Alas, there is no such thing as a calorie-free lunch (or breakfast, or dinner, or midnight snack). The negative-calorie theory hasn't been officially debunked, but all foods, with the exception of water, contain calories.

The idea of "negative-calorie" food stems from the notion that the body uses more energy to chew and digest certain foods than the food itself contains, thereby creating a net deficit in caloric intake. Some foods commonly thought to have this effect include celery, cucumbers, and cold water. However, that doesn't mean that eating these foods should be substituted for your daily workout. The amount of calories your body burns processing these low-calorie foods is so miniscule that it will not make a difference in your body weight. Additionally, these foods have little nutritional value, so if your diet is limited to these foods you may be missing out on the many vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients your body needs to maintain health.

If you are trying to lose weight, it may be helpful to consider substituting so-called "negative calorie" foods for higher-calorie ones, such as celery sticks instead of potato chips. In fact, substituting any kind of low-calorie foods (including celery and other veggies) for high-fat snacks may contribute to weight loss. However, adding "negative calorie foods" to an already healthy diet will have a miniscule (if any) effect. Some foods will cause a calorie deficit, but this deficit is tiny (think single calories) compared to the number of calories the average person eats per day.

For more tips on healthy eating, check out the *Go Ask Alice!* [Nutrition & Physical Activity](#) ^[2]

archives. Additionally, you may find it helpful to talk to your health care provider about developing a nutrition plan. To really jump-start your weight loss plan, you can also check out your local gym, fitness center, or join an exercise club to get a move on adding physical fitness to your routine! Fads aside, a realistic, long-term weight management plan includes plenty of fruits, veggies, whole grains, and lean proteins as well as a decent serving of physical activity. Take care,

Alice!

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