

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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How many smoothies have you had in the last week? How many bottles or cans of juice, whether fruit or vegetable, are on your shelves? Does the latest label claiming "5 whole servings of vegetable" in each portion attract your attention? You won't be alone, no matter how many or few you claim. Fruit and vegetable juices, smoothies, fortified teas and other beverages are hot items on menus these days. But we still need to keep track of how much we're guzzling, no matter how healthy they may seem.

One recent journal report highlights the risks of drinking too much of a good thing. It was a small study, but should still serve as a warning light. Half the young men and women were given about 1/5 their daily calories either as juice or as solid food. The juice was fruit juice, between 400 and 500 calories' worth a day. That's only 4 or 5 little kids' size juice boxes of juice, or two 16-oz bottles of fruit juice from a vending machine or convenience store. It's certainly not an extreme amount of juice for many people, whether children, teens or adults.

The other half of the group were given the same number of calories, but as solid food, a mixture of fresh fruits and vegetables plus dried fruit. To get that many calories as fresh whole fruit and vegetables meant that they were eating between 6 and 8 servings a day, more than most of us usually eat. About half of it was dried fruit (raisins, cranberries, dried apples or other fruits). Dried fruits are often a trap, since they are such concentrated sources of sugar. There were more fruits than vegetables.

Both groups stayed on this pattern for 2 months. Would you like to guess what happened to the weights of the two groups? The lean people who ate their veggies and fruit, even eating half of it as dried fruit, didn't gain a bit! They were full enough with all the fiber, moisture and other nutrients that they ate fewer calories of other food. But the lean people in the group drinking their fruits and veggies as juice gained about 3 ½ pounds. The juice did not tell their stomachs that they were full, so they kept on eating.

If that weren't bad enough news, the participants who were overweight or obese to begin the study had even worse results. Those who got all the fruits and vegetables gained about 4 pounds, but those who drank so many extra calories as juice gained 5 pounds!

Extra calories, even 'healthy' calories, will still add up when we eat too many. But is it so much easier to overdose on the liquid calories. Just compare: while 400 extra calories of apple juice is two 16-oz bottles, 400 calories of fresh apple is 5 and a half medium apples. Which is easier to consume without thinking? We can stick a bottle of juice in the cup holder in the car and drink the whole thing just driving to work or school. Would we eat 3 or 4 apples as easily?

If we're drinking our fruits in smoothies the dangers are even higher. Part of the problem is the huge portions, so share with a friend or two. But consider this: a small all-fruit smoothie at many quick-food outlets offers 200 or more calories. Add yogurt, add about 100 calories. Some of the name brand smoothies, even the 'low-fat' versions, are over 400 calories for the smallest portion! It would take 7 medium apples to give you the calories of one smoothie. Bet you'd get tired and stop eating before you finished!

If you're really hooked on smoothies to start the day, here's one that is not only about half the calories (115 cal per serving), but really does have a good supply of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Use Greek style yogurt to make it thicker. Its two layers will brighten a child's morning. Give it a whirl.

Good Morning Melons

1 ½ cups cubed watermelon, frozen

1 cup cubed cantaloupe

½ cup plain, fat-free yogurt

¼ cup orange juice

Puree watermelon in blender until smooth. Divide into 2 tall glasses. Combine cantaloupe, yogurt and juice in blender and puree until smooth. Pour carefully over the glasses of watermelon slush. Serve with a straw or long teaspoon. Serves 2.