

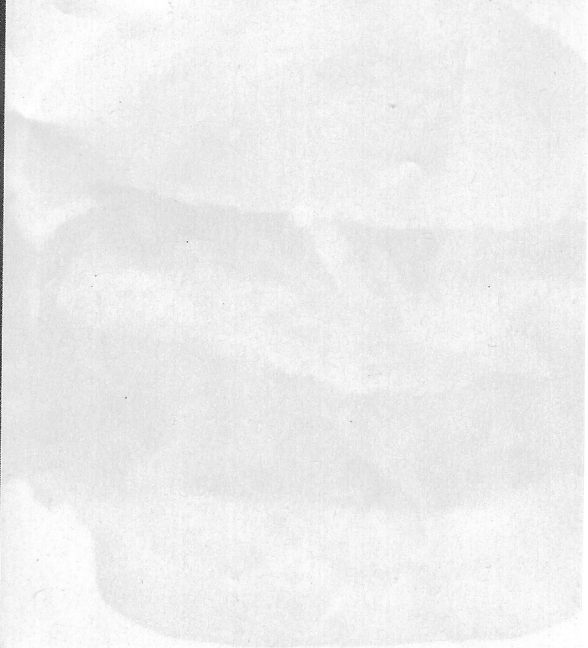
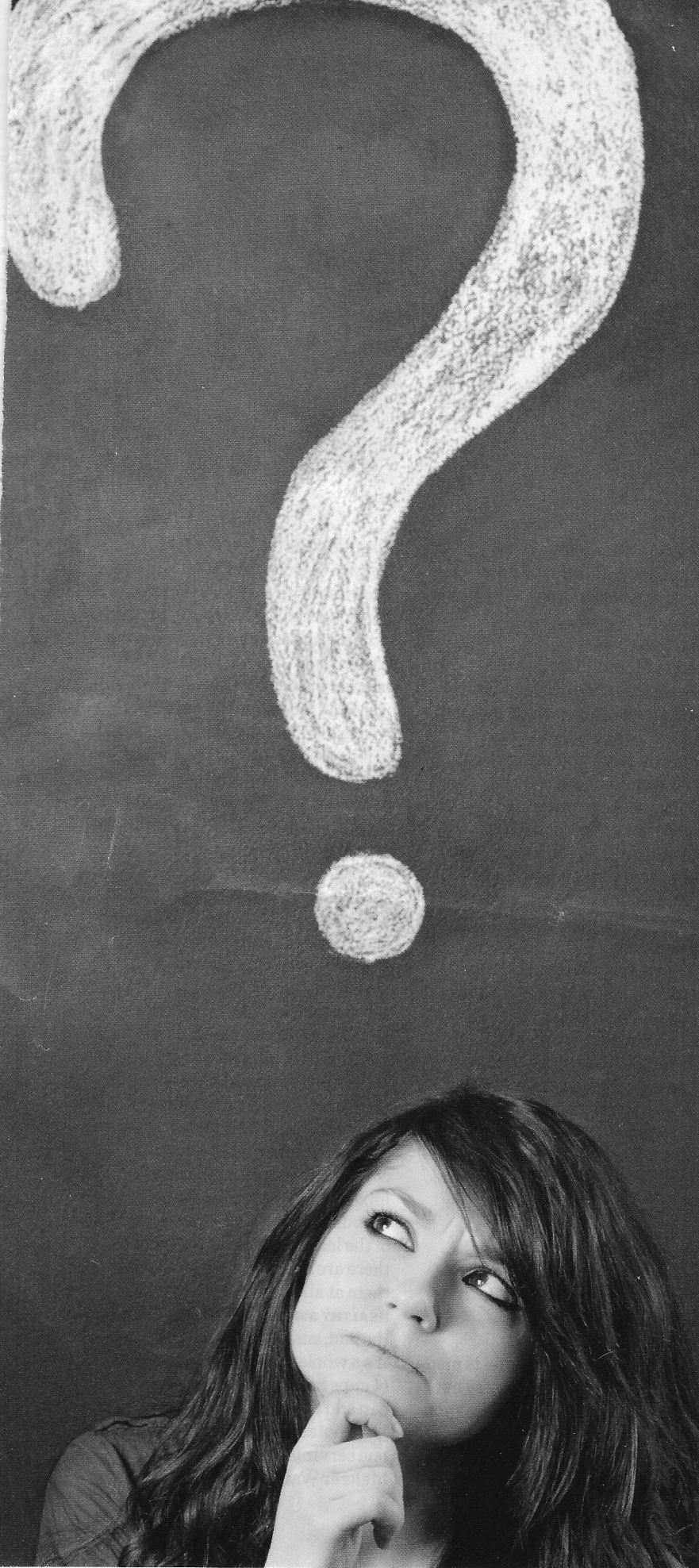
THAT'S HEALTHY, RIGHT?

Readers share their favorite go-to foods for eating well, but are their choices really all that healthful?

BY JESSICA MIGALA

We know you try your best to eat foods that are good for you—most of the time, anyway. So we weren't surprised when you told us you go for products that are low-fat (pretzels), made with vegetables (veggie burgers), and low in calories (rice cakes). You might be surprised to find out your picks are not as optimal as you thought. "Some foods have a reputation of being nutritious, but they're actually high in fat, sugar, and salt," says Beth Warren, RD, author of *7 Steps to Living a Real Life with Real Food* (Skyhorse Publishing; 2014). "You have to do some detective work to find healthy choices." Luckily, we've done the work for you. Making these savvy swaps for some of your favorite foods can help you feel more satisfied, drop pounds, and keep energized.

PHOTOGRAPHS, RICE CAKE: ISTOCK.COM/DORICONNELL. OPPOSITE PAGE: TODOR TSVETKOV/GETTY IMAGES.



READER FAVE: Rice cakes

"When I'm hungry but trying to cut calories, I snack on rice cakes. They have hardly any calories!"

Jen, Chicago, IL

THE FLAWS: One rice cake contains just 35 calories and zero fat, so if you need to satisfy a desire to munch on something, it's not a bad choice. Unfortunately, most rice cakes lack protein and fiber—two key ingredients that fill you up and keep you feeling full. "Since they're so unsatisfying, people end up eating the whole bag in an attempt to feel full," Warren says.

HEALTHY SWAP: Go for a fiber-rich whole grain cracker in place of a rice cake, and top it with a source of protein or fat to slow digestion for lasting energy. Consider one quarter of an avocado, 1 tablespoon of almond butter, or 2 tablespoons of hummus.

READER FAVE:

Reduced-fat peanut butter

"I don't notice a taste difference between reduced-fat peanut butter and regular!"

Sarah, Fort Worth, TX

THE FLAWS: Two tablespoons of peanut butter contains about 180 calories and 16 grams of fat; the same amount of the reduced-fat variety contains about 190 calories and 12 grams of fat. Why such a little difference in calories? "Brands add sugar in place of fat," says Keri Gans, RDN, author of *The Small Change Diet* (Gallery Books; 2011). You want that fat. "Peanuts pack healthy unsaturated fats," she says. It's this fat that helps keep you full and may help you lose weight, according to research published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.



HEALTHY SWAP: Go for natural peanut butter made with just peanuts and maybe a little salt, Gans says. And eat an appropriate serving size. Two tablespoons is right for a meal such as breakfast; stick to 1 tablespoon (paired with an apple, for example) as a snack.

READER FAVE: Veggie burgers

"Veggie burgers are a great meat-free way for me to get the protein I need to feel full."

Karla, Costa Mesa, CA

THE FLAWS: Just because it has "veggie" in the name doesn't mean it's good for you. Some brands contain a lot of processed soy (which isn't as nutritious as the whole-food form from edamame, soybeans, and tofu) and very few real vegetables, says Rachel Meltzer Warren, RD, author of *The Smart Girl's Guide to Going Vegetarian* (Sourcebooks Fire; 2014). Veggie burgers often pack tons of sodium (20–30 percent or more over the recommended daily allowance); plus, if you're topping them with cheese and mayo—and putting them in the middle of a large bun made with refined white flour—you could end up with a high-calorie, high-fat meal.

HEALTHY SWAP: Buy brands that list beans, grains, nuts, and veggies (such as mushrooms and carrots) first on the ingredients list, rather than those made mainly of soy and wheat protein. Choose a burger with an ingredients list that sounds as if it was made in someone's kitchen rather than a chemistry lab, Meltzer Warren says. A good brand to try: Amy's.

READER FAVE: Smoothies

"I like having a fruit smoothie in the afternoon. It's a healthy snack to take in the car when I'm on the go."

Tangela, Lakeland, FL

THE FLAWS: Many smoothies are more like an oversize dessert than a healthful snack. Juice, which lacks the filling fiber of whole fruit and can contain a large amount of sugar, is often the main liquid used in smoothies. Those containing fat-free frozen yogurt or sherbet sound healthful (they're lower in fat than ice cream), but they still add sugar. That's why some smoothies pack about the same amount of sugar as a milk shake.

HEALTHY SWAP: Make a nutritious version at home so you can control the ingredients and keep your serving size in check, says Melissa Litwak, RD. Skip the fruit juice and honey, and opt for a cup of low-fat milk or plain low-fat yogurt blended with a cup of frozen berries, a tablespoon of ground flaxseed, a half teaspoon of cinnamon, and water (if the smoothie is too thick).

READER FAVE: Falafel

"I love to order falafel when I go to a Mediterranean restaurant. Chickpeas are healthy, right?"

Tina, Oakbrook, IL

THE FLAWS: Even though falafel is made with fiber-rich chickpeas, they're not so healthful when fried. And when you load up falafel with a creamy sauce, hummus, and feta cheese and stuff it into pita bread, you're piling on way

more calories than you might think, Meltzer Warren says. Plus, a falafel sandwich with the works can contain more than half of your daily limit of sodium—that's more salt than you get in three large orders of fries!

HEALTHY SWAP: Choose baked falafel over fried, and consider serving it over a salad instead of in a pita. Load on lower-calorie toppings such as mixed greens, red cabbage slaw, cucumber, and tomato. Skip the creamy sauce, and top it with a very light sprinkle of feta.

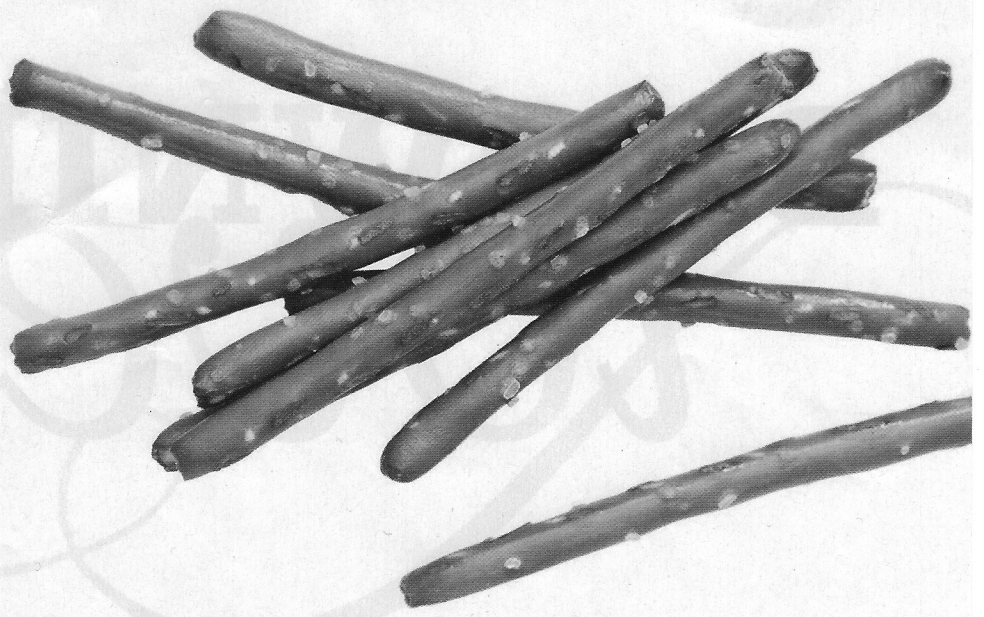
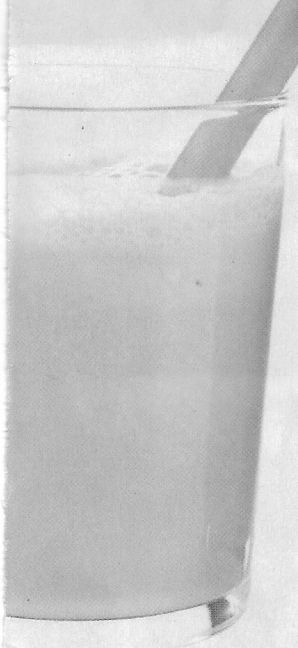
READER FAVE: Veggie chips

"I snack on veggie chips as a healthier alternative to potato chips when I have a craving for salty and crunchy."

Christina, San Francisco, CA

THE FLAWS: Because most brands are deep-fried, veggie chips generally aren't much better for you than potato chips and can have about the same amount of fat and calories. Veggie puffs, straws, and crisps are made mostly of potato flour and cornstarch with a veggie powder mixed in. Be especially wary of brands that list veggie powder as one of the last ingredients; that means there are hardly any vegetables in them at all!

HEALTHY SWAP: To nip salty cravings in the bud, snack on air-popped popcorn. It's a whole grain, you can eat a lot of it (4 cups has only 120 calories), and you can add flavor with herbs and spices. Love potato chips? "Eat—and enjoy—one serving, and then move on," Meltzer Warren says.



READER FAVE: Granola

"I love eating a bowl of granola because it's a great way to get protein and fiber for breakfast."

Shari, Chicago, IL

THE FLAWS: Granola does contain protein and fiber, but it's often high in sugar, which skyrockets the calorie count, Gans says. It's no wonder, then, that just a half cup of granola can easily contain 200–300 calories. Plus, granola's smaller pieces hardly fill up your bowl. That tricks you into serving yourself more, suggests a recent Penn State study. So you're probably eating at least two servings.

HEALTHY SWAP: Gans likes KIND Healthy Grains Clusters because it's lower in sugar and higher in fiber. Still, at about 200 calories per serving, you'll want to watch portion size. If you can't give up granola, use it to garnish yogurt or smoothies. Or mix it with high-fiber cereal to cut calories while still getting that yummy, sweet crunch.

READER FAVE: Yogurt-covered raisins

"Yogurt and raisins are both healthy, so these are the perfect treat when I need something sweet."

Lauren, New York, NY

THE FLAWS: That "yogurt" coating is little more than sugar and oil—with a bit of yogurt powder thrown in—so you get none of the benefits of dairy, such as calcium, protein, or probiotics. And as for healthy, well... a third cup of yogurt-covered raisins has roughly the same amount of calories and fat as three Oreos. Because the sugar causes your blood sugar to rise and fall rapidly,

this is a snack that will quickly leave you hungry again, Warren says.

HEALTHY SWAP: For a sweet treat, go for dark-chocolate-covered almonds. The chocolate provides disease-fighting antioxidant polyphenols, while the almonds supply fiber, protein, and fat to help manage blood sugar. Just limit the portion to a handful.

READER FAVE: Turkey bacon

"Turkey bacon is just as tasty and crispy as the real thing. You can eat three strips for about 70 calories!"

Natasha, Louisville, KY

THE FLAWS: Many brands of turkey bacon do have half the fat, calories, and saturated fat of regular bacon, but, nutritionally, it still isn't the best substitute for bacon.

HEALTHY SWAP: Opt for a slice or two of Canadian bacon instead, Gans says. Choose a brand which uses few ingredients. When compared with turkey bacon by weight, Canadian bacon is slightly lower in calories, fat (including saturated fat), and sodium, and slightly higher in protein. Because Canadian bacon is still a cured, processed meat that is fairly high in

sodium and can contain nitrates and nitrites that are linked to certain types of cancer, you won't want to eat it every day.

READER FAVE: Pretzels

"Pretzels aren't fried, so they don't have as much fat as other snacks."

Anne, Syracuse, NY

THE FLAWS: Pretzels are typically made from refined grains—pure carbs that lack fiber and won't keep you satisfied for long, Litwak says. Plus, flavored pretzels (such as cheddar), can contain extra sodium and calories.

HEALTHY SWAP: Choose plain whole grain pretzels that list whole wheat flour or other whole grains such as brown rice or quinoa as the first ingredient. Examples are Utz Multi Grain Pretzels or Mary's Gone Crackers Sea Salt Pretzels. These have a bit more fiber (2–4 grams versus 1 gram in regular pretzels). To make your snack a little more substantial, dip whole grain pretzels into almond butter, guacamole, or salsa, or make a quick trail mix with pretzels, nuts, and raisins. **U**

