

Coffee Truths.....

Remember back in the not-so-distant past when you walked into a coffee shop and you basically had three choices: coffee... coffee with milk or cream... or coffee with milk or cream and sugar?

My favorite coffee drink -- thanks to my overprotective mom and the fact I was a bundled-up 6th grader about to set out for a frigid half-mile walk to school -- was half coffee, half milk and 4 teaspoons of real-deal sugar. Yes, my rare cup of coffee was a whiter shade of pale. But it nicely matched my cold-weather complexion.

Not a lot has changed. Well, I do usually skip the sugar or sweetener. But I still need my coffee on the light side. Milk doesn't cut it for me anymore. And recently I said farewell to my beloved half-and-half for the joys of light cream.

And then there was my high-cal, high-fat dalliance with the scrumptious Vanilla Bean Coolattas at Dunkin' Donuts. But I'm getting ahead of myself. That, as you may know, is a coffee shop drink that contains no coffee. And that's where the troubles really take off.



Question: When is a coffee drink not a coffee drink? Answer: When it's a 710-calorie concoction that more closely resembles a fat-packed, super-thick milkshake! In this case, the Venti Mocha Coconut Frappuccino served up at your neighborhood Starbucks. Sadly, this coffee drink on steroids is just part of a growing market for java-based giants available at a swelling number of franchises like Starbucks, Dunkin' Donuts... even Dairy Queen!

The Starbucks concoction recently had the "honor" of being named one of the 10 Foods You Should Never Eat. Mr. Bad Food was already steaming over the rise of over-the-top coffee drinks when he received his snail mail come-on from the food police who publish the *Nutrition Action Healthletter*.

According to the folks at the NAH, the blended coffee drink packs "26 grams of fat (19 of them saturated -- almost a full day's quota of artery clogging fat)..." So just how bad is this coffee drink? One 20-ounce cup holds the equivalent nutritional badness of TWO McDonald's Quarter Pounders.

"These drinks are more like milk shakes than coffee," CSPI senior nutritionist Jayne Hurley has been quoted as saying. "Still, I doubt that many people expect that a drink from Starbucks can be as bad for your arteries as a three-quarter-pound New York strip steak. If ever there were a poster beverage for requiring calorie information on menu boards, this is it."

Black coffee has helped many a dieter stay the course. A steamy serving quells your hunger without adding a single calorie to your daily intake. It's when you begin jazzing up your java that your diet lands in hot water.

A few of the more notorious coffee shop concoctions:

- Dairy Queen Mocha MooLatte: 590 calories & 23 grams of fat (15 saturated)
- DQ's French Vanilla MooLatte: 570 cals & 18g fat (14 saturated)
- Dunkin' Donuts Coffee Coolatta: 350 cals & 22g fat (14 saturated)
- Dunkin' Donuts Caramel Swirl Latte: 230 cals & 6g fat (3.5 saturated)
- Dunkin' Donuts Iced Mocha Swirl Latte: 240 cals & 8g fat (4.5 saturated)
- Starbucks Venti Vanilla Creme: 520 cals & 27g fat (16 saturated)
- Starbucks Venti Double Chocolate Chip Frappuccino: 750 cals & 28g fat (16 saturated)

It's easy to see how one or two of these treats a day can doom any diet. But don't despair. You can have your coffee and drink it too. Rewarding yourself with a high-cal specialty coffee every once in a while is

okay. Life without goodies like this would be plain boring. And it's a proven fact that deprivation does not make for a diet that works.

Susan Burke, eDiets Vice President of Nutrition Services, writes: "The secret of keeping healthy and at your goal weight is making healthy choices wherever you go. You can make healthy choices even in coffee drinks. Lower the fat by requesting nonfat or low-fat milk. Control the amount of sugar by requesting non-sweetened drinks, or add your own sugar or artificial sweetener if you prefer.

"Yes, coffee in moderation is fine. There is nothing wrong with a little cream and sugar. However, one of the fatty Coolatta coffee drinks served up by Dunkin' Donuts has over 400 calories, 22 grams of fat and 14 grams of saturated fat! That's as much as a Quarter Pounder or two chocolate frosted donuts.

"Don't forget the 50 grams of sugar per serving. That's over 12 teaspoons of added sugar! To add insult to injury: you'll also get 75 milligrams of cholesterol from the cream. Portion size counts! If you order a large drink, just think... you are getting a lot more calories, sugar and fat!

"Instead of a frozen coffee drink, order a large iced coffee with nonfat or 1 percent milk, and sweeten with two packets of sugar for about 180 calories and no fat. Each teaspoon of sugar adds about 16 calories. An iced coffee with milk gives you an added bonus of 60 percent of your daily value for calcium and 20 percent of your daily value for vitamin A.

"If you like a creamier drink, order iced coffee with 2 percent milk. For 240 calories and 2 grams of fat, it's still a much better bargain for your health. When you make healthy choices wherever you go, you can easily reach your healthy weight and stay there."

Thirsting for more advice on how to escape being scalded by the extra fat and calories? To help you keep losing weight without giving up that daily cup of joe, we've identified four common coffee-bar diet dangers and provided some satisfying alternatives:

1. Specialty Drinks

If it sounds indulgent, there's a good chance that it is. Even a hot chocolate or latte made with whole milk and topped off with whipped cream tips the scale.

Better bets: A 12-ounce latte with fat-free milk still packs 161 calories, so choose a nonfat cappuccino and you'll cut that number down to 110 calories. Why not go back to the basics with a classic cup of brewed coffee and fat-free milk?

2. Trendy Tea

Tea certainly sounds like a healthier option and in most cases, it is. But order a Chai Tea Latte (a blend of black tea, spices and in some cases, sugar) and you'll get a hefty dose of more than 200 calories along with those nutrients and antioxidants (even if you request fat-free milk).

Better bets: Stick with a cup of soothing herbal tea, or the more traditional black or green tea. Simply flavor with lemon or a splash of fat-free milk.

3. Syrups and Toppers

Opt for a vanilla nonfat latte over a regular nonfat latte and you're adding about 75 calories. Why the jump? Each shot of vanilla, amaretto or hazelnut flavoring adds from 65 to 75 calories. Top it off with some whipped cream and you'll get a whopping 150 calories and 12 grams of fat.

Better bets: Go with the least number of bells and whistles -- you'll also make things easier on those overworked coffee shop counterworkers during rush hour too.

4. Self-Serve Add-Ins

A few teaspoons of sugar can tack on 50 calories or more to your coffee (powdered cocoa and natural sugar contribute a similar number). Definitely skip the half-and-half and whole milk.

Better bets: If you must sweeten or flavor your drink, use an artificial sweetener, or a dash of more festive nutmeg or cinnamon, and you'll get fewer calories.

Worried that you are downing too much coffee a day? Health experts say as long as you keep it in moderation (about 250 milligrams or two 8-ounce cups a day), you're probably safe.

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