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# WELLNESS WEEKLY

## Spoiler Alert!

Many of us watch what we eat but not what we drink when on a diet. That's a mistake. The average American gets a fifth of daily calories from beverages. Choosing the right drinks can tweak your metabolism, curb your appetite, and reduce your total calorie count. Which drinks are **spoilers** and which are **helpers** on the path to weight loss?

### Spoiler: Soda

Every time you chug a bottle of soda, you're consuming hundreds of empty calories. Switching to diet soft drinks is an obvious way to cut calories, but the research is mixed on whether this switch results in weight loss. Some studies show a short-term benefit. Others find diet soda drinkers gain weight. If your calorie intake exceeds what you burn off, just switching to diet soda may not do the trick.

### Helper: Water

Replacing carbonated soft drinks with water will cut hundreds of calories per day, and the benefits don't stop there. Drinking two glasses of water before a meal may encourage the stomach to feel full more quickly, so you don't eat as much. In addition, research suggests drinking plenty of water may have a positive effect on your metabolism.

### Jury's Out: Fruit Juice

Juice can have as many calories as soda, but it has more to offer in the way of nutrients. This presents a dilemma -- you want the vitamins and antioxidants without all the extra sugar. The safest bet: Look for 100% fruit juice. Steer clear of juice drinks that have added sweeteners. Look for the percent of real juice, noted on the nutritional label.

### Helper: Vegetable Juice

Vegetable juice is every bit as nutritious as fruit juice with about half the calories. One cup of tomato juice has 41 calories, compared to 122 calories for orange juice. Choosing juice with pulp provides some fiber, too, which can help control hunger.



### Jury's Out: Smoothies

Blend a banana, strawberries, and blueberries into a frothy smoothie, and you've got a delicious arsenal of disease-fighting vitamins & minerals. The homemade variety is best when you're counting calories, because you can control the ingredients -- skim milk and fresh or frozen fruit are all you need. Restaurant smoothies may contain ice cream, honey, or other sweeteners that boost the calorie count sky-high.

### Spoiler: Fancy Coffee

Once you add heavy cream, flavored syrups, and/or a snowcap of whipped cream, that innocent mug of black coffee becomes a minefield of fat and sugar. Specialty coffees can contain up to 570 calories per cup -- possibly more than an entire meal! If you don't like your coffee black, add a little skim milk and artificial sweetener to keep the calorie count low.

### Helper: Green Tea

Green tea is another excellent choice when you're looking for a little caffeine. Not only is it calorie-free, some research suggests green tea extract may stimulate weight loss. The benefit appears to last only a few hours, so it may help to drink green tea at least twice a day.

### Spoiler: Cocktails

A shot of hard liquor has fewer calories than wine or wine coolers, but once you mix in soda or cream, watch out... An 8-ounce white Russian made with light cream has 715 calories. A less fattening option is to mix rum or vodka with diet soda.