



# Empty Calories

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## What are empty calories?

Currently, many of the foods and beverages Americans eat and drink contain **empty calories** - calories from solid fats and/or added sugars. Solid fats and added sugars add calories to the food but few or no nutrients. For this reason, the calories from solid fats and added sugars in a food are often called empty calories. Learning more about solid fats and added sugars can help you make better food and drink choices.

- **Solid fats** are fats that are solid at room temperature, like butter, beef fat, and shortening. Some solid fats are found naturally in foods. They can also be added when foods are processed by food companies or when they are prepared.
- **Added sugars** are sugars and syrups that are added when foods or beverages are processed or prepared.

## What foods contain solid fats and added sugars?

Solid fats and added sugars can make a food or beverage more appealing, but they also can add a lot of calories. The foods and beverages that provide the most empty calories for Americans are:

- Cakes, cookies, pastries, and donuts (contain both solid fat and added sugars)
- Sodas, energy drinks, sports drinks, and fruit drinks (contain added sugars)
- Cheese (contains solid fat)
- Pizza (contains solid fat)
- Ice cream (contains both solid fat and added sugars)
- Sausages, hot dogs, bacon, and ribs (contain solid fat)

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These foods and beverages are the major sources of empty calories, but many can be found in forms with less or no solid fat or added sugars. For example, low-fat cheese and low-fat hot dogs can be purchased. You can choose water, milk, or sugar-free soda instead of drinks with sugar. Check that the calories in these products are less than in the regular product.

### What are “empty calorie foods”?

In some foods, like most candies and sodas, **all** the calories are empty calories. These foods are often called "empty calorie foods." However, empty calories from solid fats and added sugars can also be found in some other foods that contain important nutrients. Some examples of foods that provide nutrients, shown in forms with and without empty calories are:

Food with some empty calories	Food with few or no empty calories
Sweetened applesauce (contains added sugars)	Unsweetened applesauce
Regular ground beef (75% lean) (contains solid fats)	Extra lean ground beef (95% or more lean)
Fried chicken (contains solid fats from frying and skin)	Baked chicken breast without skin
Sugar-sweetened cereals (contain added sugars)	Unsweetened cereals
Whole milk (contains solid fats)	Fat-free milk

Making better choices, like unsweetened applesauce or extra lean ground beef, can help keep your intake of added sugars and solid fats low.

**A small amount of empty calories is okay, but most people eat far more than is healthy.** It is important to limit empty calories to the amount that fits your calorie and nutrient needs. You can lower your intake by eating and drinking foods and beverages containing empty calories less often or by decreasing the amount you eat or drink.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

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