NUTRITION DIVA'S

SECRETS FOR A HEALTHY DIET

ALSO BY MONICA REINAGEL

The Inflammation-Free Diet Plan

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NUTRITION DIVA'S

SECRETS FOR A HEALTHY DIET

WHAT TO EAT,

WHAT TO AVOID,

AND WHAT TO STOP

WORRYING ABOUT!

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CHAPTER THREE

Packaged and Prepared Foods

AT THE GROCERY store, processed, packaged, and prepared foods occupy most of the shelf space and fresh, whole foods are in the minority. Ideally, your grocery cart—and day—will be exactly the opposite, with more fresh, whole foods and fewer processed, packaged, and prepared foods. Compared with meals you make yourself, processed foods tend to contain less of the good stuff (like nutrients) and more of the bad stuff (like excess sodium, sugar, calories, and additives).

However, there is no denying the convenience of ready-made meals, especially when schedules are tight. You'll find ready-to-eat options throughout the grocery store, from canned soups to frozen dinners to dehydrated mixes. And fortunately, there are some newer brands that cater to health-conscious consumers, so it's become a bit easier to find healthier options. In this chapter, I won't be making the sort of "Best Choices" recommendations that I did in the last two chapters. The number of options is simply too vast and changing too fast for that to be practical. Instead, I'll give you some tips on how to make wise choices when selecting packaged foods. Regardless of the brand or format, however, the secret to finding the best choices is in learning how to decode the information on the package.

PACKAGED FOODS

Keep in mind that the information on the *front* of the package is advertising. The manufacturer can't say anything that's untrue, of course. But they're certainly going to put the best possible spin on things. They're going to draw attention to the fact that the product is Organic! High in fiber! Gluten-free! You're not going to see little starbursts proclaiming Lots of preservatives! High in sodium! Fortified with synthetic vitamins to replace what got lost in processing! To get the whole story, you need to turn the package over and look for the ingredient list and Nutrition Facts label.

Ingredients Should Be Foods, Not Chemicals

Start by scanning the ingredient list. Do you see ingredients you recognize as foods? Or does it read like the inventory of a chemistry lab? Compare, for example, the ingredient lists of these two brands of frozen veggie burgers. Which one looks more like a recipe to you?

BOCA BURGER'S ALL-AMERICAN MEATLESS SOY BURGERS	DR. PRAEGER'S CALIFORNIA STYLE VEGGIE BURGERS
Water, Soy Protein Concentrate, Mild Reduced Fat Cheddar, Wheat Gluten, Salt, Soy Sauce, Cheese Flavor, Dried Onion, Yeast Extract, Autolyzed Yeast Extract, Partially Hydrogenated Cottonseed and Soybean Oil, Defatted Wheat Germ, Sesame Oil, Caramel Color, Methylcellulose, Dextrose, Lactic Acid, Partially Hydrogenated Soybean Oil	Carrots, Onions, String beans, Soybeans, Zucchini, Oat Bran, Peas, Spinach, Expeller Pressed Canola Oil, Broccoli, Textured Soy Flour, Corn, Oat Fiber, Red Pepper, Arrowroot, Corn Meal, Corn Starch, Garlic, Salt, Parsley, Black Pepper, All Natural Vegetable Gum

Almost all of the ingredients on the right are foods that I regularly cook with myself. By comparison, the ingredient list on the left looks more like instructions for a chemistry experiment. I can only find six ingredients that I've ever used in a recipe—including water and salt.

I'm not against chemistry, by the way. It's not that autolyzed yeast extract or methylcellulose are harmful. Both, in fact, are perfectly harmless. (I can't say the same for partially hydrogenated soybean oil.) But in what aisle of the grocery store would you look for them? Where would you find the dextrose or lactic acid or caramel color? A long list of ingredients that you'd have difficulty finding in a grocery store is the hallmark of a highly processed, industrially produced food. No matter how many vitamins they spray on at the end of the conveyor belt, these manufactured products can never match the nutritional value of real food.

In the previous two chapters, I highlighted the healthiest fresh foods and ingredients in the grocery store. These are the foods you want to see in ingredient lists on packaged foods. When you see olive oil instead of soybean oil or honey instead of high-fructose corn syrup, or herbs instead of artificial flavors, it suggests that the manufacturers are using the same type of ingredients that you'd choose if you were doing the cooking.

Remember as well that ingredients are listed in order by the amount used, from the biggest percentage to the smallest. I'm impressed, for example, that eight out of the first ten ingredients in the Dr. Praeger's burgers are vegetables. By contrast, I have to get a third of the way down the ingredient list for the Boca Burgers before hitting the first (and only) thing that looks sort of like a vegetable. It's a good sign when the ingredient list contains things you recognize—things you'd be able to find elsewhere in the grocery store. It's even better when the ingredients that reflect the kinds of foods you want to emphasize in your diet.

Trans Fats: The Good, the Bad, and the Invisible

Most people have heard that trans fats are bad news—in particular, the partially hydrogenated vegetable oils used in packaged and processed foods. These are fats that have been chemically rearranged to increase their shelf life. Although this process makes them more use-

ful to manufacturers, it also makes them more destructive to the human body. The trans fats in partially hydrogenated oils clog arteries and provoke inflammation and cell damage. There are even studies suggesting that they are more fattening than other fats, even though they contain the same number of calories.

But not all trans fats are human-made. Small amounts of trans fats occur naturally in dairy and beef. These natural trans fats don't seem to have the same damaging health effects as the human-made trans fats that you find in hydrogenated vegetable oils. In fact, preliminary research suggests that some of the naturally occurring trans fats in dairy may actually be beneficial!

For several years now, trans fats have been listed on the Nutrition Facts label of packaged foods. Unfortunately, there's no way to distinguish between harmful, human-made trans fats and harmless, natural trans fats. What's worse, labeling laws allow manufacturers to "round down," meaning that foods containing a half gram of trans fats per serving or less may be labeled "0 grams trans fat" or trans-fat free. If you're trying to avoid human-made trans fats (which I think is a very good idea), your best bet is to check the ingredient list and avoid foods that list "partially hydrogenated" oils.

What about Fully Hydrogenated Oil?

If an oil is fully hydrogenated, it no longer contains any trans fats. Instead, it has been chemically transformed into saturated fat. Because it contains no trans fats, fully hydrogenated oil is not as harmful as partially hydrogenated oil—but not as healthy as monounsaturated fats, either.

THE QUICK AND DIRTY SECRET

Avoid packaged foods that contain partially hydrogenated oils.

The Many Aliases of Sugar

One big reason that sugar intake is so out of control these days is that sugar is added—in one form or another—to virtually every packaged and processed food. The more processed foods you include in your diet, the faster these hidden sugars can add up. When scanning ingredient lists, watch for words that signal added sugar:

Sugar (beet, brown, cane, confectioner's, date, demerara, grape, invert, malt, powdered, raw, turbinado)
Cane (crystals, juice, syrup)
Syrup (malt, corn, maple, cane, high fructose, glucose/fructose, refiner's, rice, sorghum)
Words ending in "ose" (glucose, fructose, sucrose, dextrose, maltose)
Maltodextrin
Honey
Molasses
Malt (syrup, barley, sugar)
Concentrated fruit juice (pear, grape)

Be particularly alert for ingredient lists that contain sugar in several different forms. Using small amounts of several types of sweeteners allows the manufacturers to bury these ingredients farther down the list—even though sugar may still be one of the principal ingredients.

LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Is High Fructose Corn Syrup Worse than Sugar?

You may have heard that the United States—and most of the Western world—has a growing obesity problem. One likely reason is that we're consuming far more sugar than we used to. When consumed in these prodigious quantities, refined sugar seems to affect appetite and metabolism in ways that promote obesity. Lately, there's been a lot of focus on high-fructose corn syrup, a refined sweetener that's

widely used in processed foods and beverages. But the problem isn't that it's that much worse for you than other forms of sugar—or even that it's particularly high in fructose (it contains roughly the same amount of fructose as cane sugar). If high-fructose corn syrup is to blame for rising obesity rates, it is simply because it has become the primary source of sugar in the modern diet.

Avoiding high-fructose corn syrup can be an effective way to reduce your sugar intake. What's more, foods made with high-fructose corn syrup tend to be highly processed and without a lot of nutritional value. You're better off without them! But if you simply replace these foods with things made with cane sugar or other sweeteners instead, you won't have accomplished much.

The goal is to reduce your consumption of all sweeteners, even the natural ones.

HOW TO USE THE NUTRITION FACTS LABEL

After you've vetted the ingredient list, you also want to check the Nutrition Facts label to see how the food adds (or subtracts) from your nutrition goals from the day.

Serving Size

First, check how many servings the package contains. You'd be amazed at how many things that appear to be packaged as single servings are listed as two or three servings on the Nutrition Facts label. If you overlook this critical fact, you could easily be consuming far more calories than you mean to.

Calories

To get a quick estimate of what percentage of the day's calorie intake a food represents, knock off the last digit and then divide in half. For

example, if a serving contains 180 calories, it represents about 9 percent of your daily allowance (18 ÷ 2 = 9). That's sounds right for a snack but might be a little skimpy for an entire meal. On the other hand, a 560 calorie item—more than a quarter of the day's allowance—is probably a little much for an appetizer.

Daily Values

The Nutrition Facts label will also tell you how much fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrate, fiber, and protein a food contains. To shed some light on what these numbers signify, the label also tells you what percentage of the Daily Value these amounts represent. The Daily Values are based on the average needs of a healthy adult with a 2,000 calorie diet. Even if this one-size-fits-all guideline isn't a perfect fit for *you,* these numbers are still useful.

Balancing the Numbers

The Daily Values (DVs) are not meant to be the last word in how much or little of each nutrient you should be taking in. Instead, use them as a quick way to gauge whether a ready-to-eat option makes a balanced meal. Here are some of the things I look for:

PROTEIN (% DV) EQUAL TO OR GREATER THAN CARBOHYDRATE (% DV)—As I'll talk more about in part 2, there's a fairly broad range of what's acceptable in terms of protein and carbohydrate intake. I think of the DV for protein (50 grams) as a recommended *minimum* and the DV for carbohydrates (300 grams) as a recommended *maximum*. Accordingly, I like to see meals where the % DV for protein is equal to or greater than the % DV for carbohydrate.

Quick Tip: The Daily Value for protein is not always included on the Nutrition Facts label. To calculate the percent Daily Value for protein, double the amount of protein grams. For example: If a serving contains 10 grams of protein, it provides 20 percent of the Daily Value for protein.

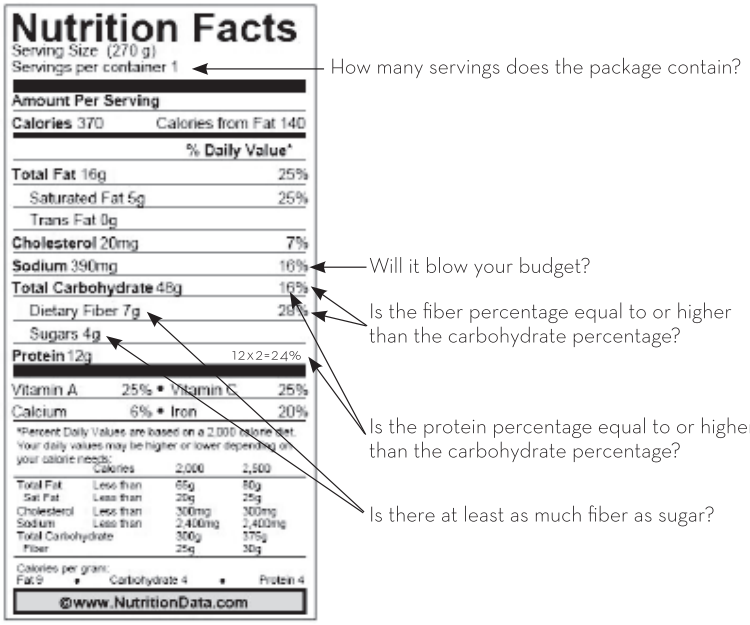
FIBER (% DV) EQUAL OR GREATER TO CARBOHYDRATE (% DV)—Fiber slows down the digestion of carbohydrates, which is generally a good thing. Slower digestion and absorption means that your blood-sugar levels stay steadier and you don't get hungry again as quickly. If a food is high in carbohydrates, it should also be high in fiber. A good rule of thumb is to look for foods where the % DV of fiber is equal to or greater than the % DV of carbohydrates.

SUGAR (g) NOT MORE THAN FIBER (g)—The carbohydrates in a food can be broken down into fiber, sugar, and starch. In addition to telling you how many grams of total carbohydrates a serving provides, the label also tells you how much of that total is fiber and sugar (everything else is starch). Most people tend to have too much sugar and not enough fiber in their diets. Avoiding foods that have more sugar than fiber will help you stay on target.

Stay Within Your Budget

The Daily Values can also help you budget your intake of things like sodium. For example, rather than choose a food that packs 60 percent of the Daily Value for sodium into a single serving, it might be wise to budget your sodium allowance more evenly throughout the day.

The Nutrition Facts Label: Putting It All Together



(from Amy's Kitchen Mexican Casserole)

THE QUICK AND DIRTY SECRET

If you want to include frozen, canned, freeze-dried, or other ready-to-eat meals in your diet, pay close attention to the ingredient list and Nutrition Facts label to identify healthier choices.

MEALS TO GO

These days, most grocery stores also double as takeout counters, with a wide array of prepared dishes. For people on the go, prepared foods from the deli counter can be awfully convenient. However, the convenience comes at a cost. Like restaurant food, prepared foods

from the grocery tend to be higher in salt, fat, and sugar than foods you'd make for yourself. And because there is usually no Nutrition Facts label for these foods, there is nothing to provide a reality check on things like calories or serving size.

Unlike at a restaurant, however, you have the advantage of being able to see the food at the prepared food counter before you order. Use that to your advantage. Dishes that look slick with oil, are smothered in creamy sauce, swimming in gravy, or encrusted with crispy coatings and toppings are usually not the best picks. Instead, look for the simpler preparations. Grilled meats, fruit- and vegetable-heavy sides, and broth-based soups are good choices. And don't be afraid to ask questions. Many grocery stores have nutrition and ingredient information for their deli items available on request. Some also offer salads made with low-fat mayonnaise or sour cream. If you don't see them, let the store know you'd be interested in lighter options.

SWEET AND SALTY TREATS

I'm sure this won't come as a big surprise, but chips, pretzels, cookies, crackers, and desserts don't add much to the nutritional quality of your diet. They're mostly a source of excess calories, sodium, and sugar. If you're doing every else right—eating your vegetables, getting enough fiber and protein, choosing healthy fats and whole grains, and so on—the occasional treat isn't going to torpedo your efforts. The problem for most people (including me) is that these foods can be very seductive. "Bet you can't eat just one!" is more than an ad slogan; it pretty much sums up the problem with sweet and salty treats. You often end up eating more than you mean to.

Unless you have an iron will, I suggest that you don't test your willpower by keeping a lot of munchies and sweets around the house. This is one case where the large value pack is not the best choice. If snack foods are occupying a large percentage of your grocery cart, it's a good sign that they're too big a part of your diet. You should buy

these foods exactly the way you should eat them—occasionally and in small quantities.

As a general rule, extras shouldn't make up more than about 10 to 15 percent of your total calories. In practical terms, that means maybe one extra for every five servings of vegetables—not the other way around.

Beware of the Health Halo

Deep down, you know that corn chips and cookies aren't healthy choices. But what about the corn chips with flaxseeds and gluten-free cookies over in the healthy foods aisle? People often overestimate the nutritional value of a food that's labeled "whole-grain" or "gluten-free." Or, they underestimate the negative impact of a food because it contains a healthful ingredient like flaxseed. This is known as the "health halo effect."

My favorite illustration of this effect is an experiment John Tierney did a couple of years ago in Brooklyn. He stopped a bunch of people on the street, showed them a photograph of a meal from a chain restaurant—one of those crunchy Asian chicken salads and a soda—and asked them to estimate how many calories the meal contained. On average, people estimated that the meal contained about 1,000 calories, which was a little high. It actually contained a little over 900 calories.

Then he stopped some more people and showed them a photo of the same salad and soda, *plus* two crackers that were labeled "trans-fat free." Despite the fact that the crackers actually added a hundred calories to the meal, the average calorie estimate for the meal with the crackers was about 800 calories—*two hundred calories less than the average estimate for same meal without the crackers*. The health halo conferred by two little words—trans-fat free—not only canceled out the calories in the crackers themselves, it erased a hundred calories from the salad sitting next to them—at least in people's minds.

Don't fall prey to the same magical thinking. By all means, read labels and look for things made with real foods instead of highly processed ingredients. Compare nutrition facts labels to find options

that are lower in sodium and sugar and higher in fiber. Just remember that chips, crackers, cookies, ice cream, and other snacks and treats are still extras—even if they are made with green tea or goji berries or air-dried sea salt.

Is Microwave Popcorn a Healthy Snack?

As snack foods go, popcorn has a lot going for it. It's a whole-grain food, it's high in fiber, low in fat and sugar. In fact, I consider it to be one of the healthiest snack options around. But I am not a big fan of microwave popcorn products. Chemicals from the bags can turn into dangerous fumes when they're heated. Microwave popcorn is often sky-high in sodium and the artificial flavorings and colorings are a real turnoff, too. Plus, the cheapskate in me can't get over the

KITCHEN TIP

Microwave Popcorn for Cheapskates

Add three tablespoons of kernels to a brown paper lunch bag. Fold down the top half-inch of the bag two or three times. Place the bag on its side in microwave and hit the "popcorn" setting. Stay close to the microwave and stop it as soon as popping slows. (Popcorn burns quickly.) Immediately dump the popped corn into a large bowl. Pop another three tablespoons of corn, using the same bag. Meanwhile, heat one tablespoon of butter over low heat in a small saucepan or measuring cup. When melted, add one tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil to the butter, swirl briefly to mix, and drizzle the mixture over the popped corn. Toss to mix and salt to taste. Makes one large bowl.

Quick Tip: I've found that the "bow-tie-guy" brand and the organic popcorn from my health food store seem to pop up better than the cheaper generic brands. Even when you spring for the premium kernels, it's still a bargain compared with packaged microwave popcorn!

fact that for what you spend for three little oversalted bags, you can buy enough popcorn to fill a small room. See my recipe for cheap, chemical-free microwave popcorn on page 97.

BEVERAGES

Water is an important part of a healthy diet, but should you buy bottled or filtered water, or is tap water okay? It really depends on the quality of your local water. Some water may be perfectly healthy but have a flavor you find unpleasant. It's also possible for water that tastes fine to contain contaminants. Water quality may also vary at different times of the year.

Many people assume that government regulations ensure the quality and safety of the water supply. But the regulations may not be as strict as you think and there are enforcement issues. If you are on a public water system, you are supposed to get a report every summer with details about your water quality and any contaminants that have been found in it. It's often included with your water bill. If you're a renter, you probably never see these reports. But many are posted online on the Environmental Protection Agency's Web site. Another alternative is to have your water tested by an independent laboratory. You'll want to choose a state-certified laboratory. You can find one in your area by calling the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 800-426-4791 or visiting www.epa.gov/safewater/labs

Bottled Water

Bottled water is not necessarily any purer or better tasting than the water that runs out of your tap. Here's a guide to the types of bottled water you're likely to find on the shelves.

TAP WATER, ONLY BETTER—Some major brands of bottled water, like Dasani and Aquafina, use tap water that's charcoal-filtered and

purified using reverse osmosis. In the process, trace minerals are removed, which can give the water a flat taste. Some brands (such as Dasani) add minerals back in after purification in order to improve the flavor. It's not enough minerals to make a big difference nutritionally, however.

SPRING WATER—Other brands, like Poland Spring and Deer Park, come from natural springs. This water is filtered naturally through sand and gravel and contains whatever minerals it acquires in the process. Spring water is usually tested regularly for contaminants and impurities. The mineral content of natural spring water can range from very low to high enough to have a noticeable impact on intake of certain nutrients. Spring water that has substantial mineral content is usually sold as "mineral water."

MYSTERY WATER—Brands that provide little or no information about where the water comes from or how it was processed may be nothing more than bottled tap water.

DISTILLED WATER—Purified using steam distillation, it is absolutely pure—not counting any plastic that might leach into it while it's sitting in the bottle. Because all trace minerals are also removed in the process, distilled water tastes sort of flat and is slightly more acidic than regular tap water.

SELTZER AND CLUB SODA—These are filtered or tap water with added carbonation. In some cases, sodium is also added (check the Nutrition Facts label). They may also be flavored with fruit flavors such as lime or lemon. Seltzer is naturally calorie- and sugar-free. Although the carbonation makes it slightly more acidic than regular water, drinking selzer water is not associated with any of the health issues (such as calcium loss or damage to tooth enamel) that I describe below in the section on soda. There appear to be no long-term consequences to drinking your water with bubbles if you prefer it that way.

Make Your Own Seltzer

If you drink a lot of seltzer water, you can save money and reduce waste with an environmentally friendly soda maker, such as the SodaStream, which carbonates tap or filtered water using a refillable CO_2 cartridge. No more recycling, no more waste, no more hauling cases of selzer water home from the store. I couldn't live without mine. Find them online at www.sodastream.com or at 1-800-763-2258.

Mineral Water

Mineral water is spring water that has a substantial amount of dissolved minerals in it. It may be still or sparkling. The amount and type of minerals give waters from various sources a distinctive taste. In some cases, they provide substantial amounts of nutrients. For example, Gerolsteiner is particularly high in calcium and magnesium, while Vichy Catalán contains a notable amount of sodium. See the table below to learn how much various mineral waters can contribute to your daily intake.

Mineral Content Per One Liter of Water

BRAND	CALCIUM	MAGNESIUM	POTASSIUM	SODIUM
Apollinaris	100 mg (10% DV)	130 mg (33% DV)	20 mg (<1% DV)	410 mg (17% DV)
Gerolsteiner	348 mg (35% DV)	108 mg (27% DV)	11 mg (<1% DV)	118 mg (5% DV)
Perrier	170 mg (17% DV)	6 mg (2% DV)	1.5 mg (<1% DV)	12 mg (<1% DV)
San Pellegrino	200 mg (20% DV)	52 mg (10% DV)	4 mg (<1% DV)	36 mg (2% DV)
Vichy Catalán	54 mg (5% DV)	9 mg (2% DV)	48 mg (1% DV)	1110 mg (46% DV)

Water Filters

One potential downside to bottled water is that the bottles themselves create an enormous amount of environmental waste. In addition, compounds can leach into the water from plastic containers, especially when stored for long periods or at high temperatures. My solution is to filter the water at home, using an inexpensive microbiological filter, and to use stainless steel reusable water bottles when I'm out and about.

If you do decide to invest in a water purification system, there are a lot of options to consider. There are units that mount on your faucet, systems that sit on the counter or under the sink, and whole-house systems that purify the water as it comes into your house. You can spend anywhere from a couple of hundred dollars to several thousand. You'll also want to match the technology to your specific concerns. For example, distillation systems do a great job removing bacteria and heavy metals but they're not so great at removing chemicals found in pesticides and herbicides. Multimedia filtration systems do a good job removing chemicals, heavy metals, and microorganisms but it can take a long time for the water to go through the filters, which can be a hassle if you're trying to filter all the water you use. On the plus side, filtration systems usually don't use any electricity.

If you're considering a purification system, it's important to know what, if anything, you're dealing with in your local water supply—because this may determine what type of system you need. If you live in an agricultural area, for example, pesticides and fertilizer runoff is a concern. If you live in an area where there is mining, there could be heavy metals in the water. If there is a lot of manufacturing or other industry close by, solvents may be a bigger problem. (See "Beverages" on page 98 for water-testing resources.)

LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

How Much Water Do You Need to Drink?

I bet you've heard it said that you need to drink at least eight glasses of water a day in order to stay properly hydrated. Like most urban legends, the two-liter-a-day rule does have some basis in fact. The average person needs about two liters, or approximately eight glasses, of water a day to replace what is lost through normal biological functions like breathing, sweating, and urinating. But that doesn't mean that you need to drink two liters of water. In fact, hypothetically, you don't have to drink any water at all. For one thing, you can easily get a liter or liter and a half of water just from the food that you eat, especially if you eat lots of fruits and vegetables, which are up to 97 percent water. Coffee, tea, and soda also contribute toward your fluid quota. (See "Caffeine: Setting the Record Straight," page 109.)

If you're involved in sustained, strenuous exercise or spend extended periods of time in very hot or dry conditions, you'll definitely need extra fluids to stay adequately hydrated. Nursing mothers also need additional fluids. And because the thirst reflex declines with age, the elderly are at a higher risk of dehydration. But barring ill health, extremely hot or dry conditions, and intense physical activity, most people can stay well hydrated by eating a reasonably healthy diet and drinking water or other nonalcoholic beverages when they are thirsty. As a rule of thumb, if you are peeing several times a day and your urine is pale in color, you are doing fine.

THE QUICK AND DIRTY SECRET

Most people can stay adequately hydrated on significantly less than eight glasses of water a day.

Soda

Soda is fine as an occasional treat but as a dietary staple—which it has become, it's an unmitigated disaster. A single soda contains

enough sugar to blow your sugar budget for the entire day. Soda is also quite acidic, and the combination of sugar and acid is extremely tough on tooth enamel. Finally, some flavors (usually the brown-colored ones) contain phosphates, which can increase calcium losses. When your diet contains plenty of calcium, that isn't a problem. But soda has replaced milk as the standard beverage for kids. That translates to reduced calcium intake and increased calcium losses during the critical years that we need to be accumulating enough bone density to last a lifetime. It's a perfect storm that's now leading to people being diagnosed with osteoporosis before they're even out of middle age. The increase in soda consumption is also the primary driving factor in childhood obesity—and it's going a long way toward keeping adults overweight, as well. Soda isn't really a beverage; it's liquid candy, and I'd encourage you to think of it the same way—as something to be consumed in small quantities (nothing larger than a 12-ounce can) and only once in a while.

THE QUICK AND DIRTY SECRET

Unless you're trying to gain weight, it's a good idea not to drink your calories.

Diet Drinks

Artificially sweetened sodas and noncarbonated soft drinks like Crystal Light don't have the sugar and calories of regular soda. However, the phosphates in diet soda can still lead to bone loss, especially if your diet isn't high in calcium. Diet soda also doesn't appear to be very effective in preventing weight gain. Studies show that the more diet soda you drink, the more likely you are to gain weight. (See also "Do Artificial Sweeteners Help with Weight Loss?" on page 65.) Although sipping artificially sweetened lemonade throughout the day may help you drink more water, it's also a good way to train a sweet tooth.

THE QUICK AND DIRTY SECRET

Artificially sweetened drinks may offer some advantages over sweetened beverages, but water is still best.

Fruit and Vitamin Waters

You'll also find drinks—both sweetened and artificially sweetened—with added vitamins, herbs, or fruit juice. Although these may sound like a healthy addition to your diet, they offer very little nutritional value. For those sweetened with sugar, the negative effects of the sugar far outweigh any small benefit. If you like the idea of getting a few extra nutrients, it's fine to choose a fortified option as your occasional soft drink. But I certainly wouldn't go out of my way to drink them for the nutritional benefits.

One Last Check Before You Check Out

We've completed our tour of the grocery store. But before you head to the checkout, take one last look at the contents of your cart. You should see a balance of wholesome foods, including plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables and other whole, unprocessed foods, and a minimum of junk. After all, you're essentially looking at your diet for the next several days. Make sure you feel good about what you see. If you see things in there that you'd probably be better off without, it's not too late to remove them! For a handy shopping list that recaps a lot of what we've talked about in Part One, see the Shopping Guide at the end of the book.

You have just read an excerpt from

Nutrition Diva's Secrets for a Healthy Diet.

If you want more health-filled tips on the foods you should (or shouldn't!) be eating, you can order or buy a copy of the book from these online retailers:

Printed Book:

Amazon | **Barnes & Noble** | **Borders** | **Powell's**

E-book:

Amazon Kindle | **Apple iBookstore**

To find out more about Nutrition Diva, Monica Reinagel, you can visit her media page here.

To discover more fun and friendly advice to help you do things better, visit the Quick & Dirty Tips website. Enjoy!