

- Eating customs

PLANT-POWERED SUMMER

Isn't summer amazing? From BBQs and picnics to festivals, fêtes and holidays, it's a busy time during which we all want to make the most of the longer days. But when the vegan options are limited, it's easy to end up eating too much of the foods that leave us feeling bloated, lethargic and unsatisfied.

Should we be worried about junk food? The term is typically used for processed food that contains unhealthy fats and/or refined flour, along with too much sugar or salt and lacks important nutrients. In other words, junk food is high in empty calories so if you fill up on it, your body won't be well nourished.

Why limit junk food?

You need good sources of nutrients at every meal, and while junk food can provide plenty of carbohydrates, fats and protein, it typically lacks vitamins and minerals. The odd burger or ice cream isn't going to do you any harm, but relying on processed foods too much can result in your levels of iron, zinc, magnesium and other minerals being too low to maintain good health. At the same time, you may also develop vitamin deficiencies and those can cause serious health problems.

What do nutritionists say?

Many nutritionists advise living by the 80/20 rule. 80% of the time you eat well, and 20% of the time you can enjoy some less-healthy treats.

If you want to have a pie, pizza or burger and chips, go for it, but make



Chips, ice cream, pizza... Processed food is not just a popular choice but an easy one too. Veronika Prošek Charvátová shows you how to find some balance in your summer menu

the other meals in the day healthy. If you want to have a big slice of chocolate cake, enjoy it and have a healthy meal later that day.

If you need to cook some quick-and-easy instant noodles, add some healthy ingredients, such as fresh vegetables, tofu or roasted seeds. If you fancy mock meat, have some broccoli and green beans on the side or choose tofu sausages instead of the less healthy ones made from protein isolates. And if you crave sweets, have them along with some fruit and plant yoghurt – it'll help slow down sugar absorption.

What works for some people is to have a day in the week when they eat junk food and treats and then they eat healthily for the rest of the week. That's not to say you should do the same, but if you feel like it might be right for you, give it a go.

Sun, sea and... chips?

Heading abroad this summer? As a vegan, your options at hotel buffets may be limited and somewhat unbalanced, which may sway your choices, but it's still possible to eat well. You just need to go prepared.

Breakfast buffets are usually easy to navigate, with the healthy choices being unsweetened muesli or other cereal, plant milks, fresh fruit and nuts and seeds as toppings. Healthy savoury options typically include wholemeal bread or toast, baked beans, mushrooms and grilled tomato, but this will vary according to what country you're visiting.

Lunch and dinner buffets can vary a lot but you'll certainly find bread, pasta, potatoes and veggies, which is a good start but doesn't make a balanced meal. Look for bean or lentil salads that offer more protein.

However, it's best to simply ask about vegan choices in advance and if you know there will be limited options, bring your own ingredients to add to the carb-fest – nuts and seeds, roasted beans and chickpeas. It's not ideal but it's better than living off potatoes, salad and biscuits. If you can, go out and find a vegan-friendly restaurant to enjoy a proper meal.

BBQ goodness

If you love summer barbecues, you know how easy it is to simply buy

some plant-based burgers or sausages and slap them on a grill. Of course, you can still do that but think about other foods too, such as peppers, courgettes, squashes and tomatoes or marinated tofu. With the right seasoning – such as garlic, pepper, soy sauce, ginger, lemon juice or chilli – every mouthful will taste amazing and will make your diet healthier.

And don't forget about fruit! Barbecued pineapple is delicious, or try grilling watermelon – its texture transforms to a salmon-like consistency when cooked.

Choose your drinks wisely

Many drinks can be a literal sugar trap, whether they are alcoholic or not. Even those that don't taste too sweet still pack a lot of sugary calories, such as lemonade, squash, fruit juice and wine. Of course, one glass won't ruin your health but drinking these all day long isn't a great idea.

What I'd advise you to always avoid, however, are fruit coolers and similar drinks from coffee chains because those pack ultra-high doses of sugar – have a look at their nutrition info before ordering.

If water is too plain for your taste and you fancy something fruity, make your own Mexican-inspired aqua fresca – simply blend water with a piece of fruit and a tiny splash of agave syrup.

Water infused with fresh fruit and herbs is also a great choice and looks lovely on the table. You only need to fill a big jug with water and throw in sliced or diced fruit, some mint or lemon balm leaves and leave it for a while. Pour through a strainer and add ice if it's really hot.

Sweet summer treats

If you're out and about and need a pick-me-up, ice creams and desserts are tempting but luckily, it's easy to satisfy your sweet tooth without junk foods. All you need is fruit, dark chocolate and nuts. From this trio, you can whip up delicious summer treats, such as fruit kebabs drizzled with chocolate and sprinkled with chopped nuts, or banana ice cream with nut butter and chocolate chips.

The main thing to remember is not to be too rigid. Enjoy a delicious summer that makes you feel great! ♥

"Nutritionists advise living by the 80/20 rule. 80% of the time you eat well, and 20% of the time you enjoy some treats."



THE AUTHOR

Veronika Prošek Charvátová is a biologist and Viva! Health researcher. Viva! Health monitors scientific research linking diet to health and provides accurate information on which you can make informed choices about the food you eat – viva.org.uk/health

6 EASY SWAPS

Confused about healthy snacking? Try these quick switches

#1. CRISPS

Switch for plain popcorn, roasted chickpeas or broad beans, flatbreads or breadsticks.



#2. BISCUITS

Try oatcakes, energy balls, crackers with fruit and nut butter or fruit and nut bars with minimal added sugar.



#3. SWEETS

Choose dried fruit, banana slices or dark chocolate.



#4. SOME MOCK MEATS

(especially those highly processed with lots of salt or additives) Try tofu/tempeh, lentil or bean burgers, jackfruit or mushroom-based meat alternatives or minimally processed mock meats such as soy chunks and seitan.



#5. PASTRIES

Swap with wholegrain wraps filled with roasted veggies or homemade vegetable filo parcels.



#6. INSTANT NOODLES

Try wholewheat noodles or Zoodles (courgette noodles).

