

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Decisions at the fair: Indulge, or be healthy?

We're planning to go to the state fair. I haven't gone in a long time and I keep thinking about all of the horribly unhealthy foods that I know I'm going to want to eat that day. I want to enjoy myself, but I'm afraid I'm going to gain back the 12 pounds I've lost this year all in one day. Any guidance?

It's certainly not likely you'll gain 12 pounds in a day of overindulgence, but that doesn't mean it's a great idea to have an elephant ear for breakfast, stromboli for lunch, bacon-on-a-stick for dinner and deep-fried ice cream for dessert. Your gastrointestinal system would probably have a hard time forgiving you for that, especially if you've been eating healthfully for months and your system isn't used to such excess.

Instead of planning for an entire day of gluttony, why not do this? Focus on one or two treats that if you didn't have, you'd end up truly disappointed. Then make smart choices the rest of the day. If you've been looking forward to a funnel cake for years, go ahead and enjoy. An occasional splurge is nothing to feel guilty about. Just be sensible.

Not all the food at fairs is "horribly unhealthy." Seek out charbroiled chicken breast, sandwich wraps or a Greek salad. In fact, the Ohio State Fair, at least, offers a phone app with not only a map and a schedule, but a searchable food finder to help you locate the type of food you want.

The fair also is encouraging food vendors to join the "Taste of the Fair" program, offering small versions of signature menu items at a reduced price. Think of this as built-in portion control. And if one of your favorites isn't participating in the program, you can control your own portions by splitting a dish with a friend or two.



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It can be difficult to make smart choices at the fair because nutrition information isn't readily available. But if you plan ahead, www.calorieking.com does offer some nutrition facts: Search for "fair food" and see if your favorites are listed. Would you really choose to indulge in a tray of deep-fried Oreos if you knew it had 890 calories? Or an order of chili fries if you knew it had nearly 700 calories?

Here are a couple of other things to remember:

- Most, if not all the time, choose water as a beverage. Not only is it the best way to keep yourself hydrated on a hot day outdoors, but you'll save yourself hundreds of calories by foregoing beverages high in sugar. If you must have flavor, unsweetened iced tea is your next best choice.
- Don't fool yourself: Deep-fried vegetables are more fat than they are vegetables. Lemon shakeups are more sugar than they are fruit. Roasted corn is a better choice for a vegetable, especially if you go easy on the butter and salt. A piece of fresh fruit is also a great choice: Ask at an ice cream stand that offers banana splits if they'd sell you just the banana, or find the local foods and farming exhibits, which sometimes offer complimentary apples or other produce. If you need a sweet icy treat, frozen bananas are healthier than ice cream.

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By Martha Filipic
614-292-9833
filipic.3@osu.edu

Editor: This column was reviewed by Carol Smathers, Ohio State University Extension specialist in Youth Nutrition and Wellness.

Chow Line is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.

College Marketing and Communications
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1043
614-292-2011

208 Research Services Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
330-263-3780

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