

Counting calories? Skip soda, splurge on the cinnamon roll

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e-mail: ehagedorn@bakersfield.com | Wednesday, Sep 20 2006 8:25 PM

Last Updated: Wednesday, Sep 20 2006 8:29 PM

Half the fun of the Kern County Fair is gorging on the sticky, greasy, deep-fried, sugar-coated, put-on-a-stick, served-on-a-paper-plate, make-your-mouth-water food.

Your stomach, heart and waistline might not think so, though.

NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF COMMON FAIR FOOD

The Food and Drug Administration recommends that people get no more than 2,000 calories a day and 65 grams of fat. To put fair food into perspective, a regular apple has 80 calories and 0.3 grams of fat, and a McDonald's Big Mac has 560 calories and 30 grams of fat.

Baked potato: 433 calories, 0.4 grams of fat
Barbecue chicken: 740 calories, 24 grams of fat
Barbecue ribs: 1,360 calories, 68 grams of fat
Bean or beef burrito: 1,100 calories, 41 grams of fat
Caramel apple: 298 calories, one gram of fat
Cheeseburger: 551 calories, 36 grams of fat
Chicken rice bowl: 869 calories, 15 grams of fat
Churro: 102 calories, 6.2 grams of fat
Cinnamon roll: 730 calories, 24 grams of fat
Corn on the cob: 201 calories, one gram of fat
Corn dog, regular: 250 calories, 14 grams of fat
Cotton candy: 171 calories, zero grams of fat
French fries: 560 calories, 24 grams of fat
Fried Snickers: 444 calories, 29 grams of fat
Fried Twinkie: 420 calories, 34 grams of fat
Funnel cake: 760 calories, 44 grams of fat
Hot dog: 214 calories, 14 grams of fat
Lemonade: 210 calories, zero grams of fat
Nachos with cheese: 861 calories, 59 grams of fat
Onion flower: 1,320 calories, 72 grams of fat
Pastrami sandwich: 758 calories, 17 grams of fat
Pizza with pepperoni, small: 794 calories, 35 grams of fat
Potato salad: 288 calories, 15 grams of fat
Snow cone: 540 calories, zero grams of fat
Soft pretzel: 340 calories, two grams of fat

Source: CalorieKing.com

"I don't know about healthy fair food," said Kris Mallory, registered dietician with Bakersfield Kaiser Permanente. "But depending on the choices you make, you can pick healthier fair food." behind the barbecue sauce and melted cheese can take a toll, Mallory said.

Look at the following scenario. You get to the fair and buy a snow cone. About an hour later you buy your dinner: barbecue chicken with fries and a lemonade. An hour or two later you get a funnel cake for dessert, and before you leave you get a caramel apple for the road.

That's 3,108 calories and 93 grams of fat -- more than 1,000 calories and 25 grams of fat over the recommended daily allotment. And that doesn't take into account what you ate for breakfast, lunch or snacks in between.

A snow cone alone, with its sugary syrup and 540 calories, has almost as many calories as a McDonald's Big Mac hamburger (560 calories).

"I don't think people realize how unhealthy it is," she said.

Mallory recommends the tri-tip dinner she has seen at the fair. Tri-tip tends to be a leaner cut of meat and isn't as fatty as a hamburger or chilliburger. Plus, the meal comes with a salad on the side.

Seek out vegetables but steer clear if they are fried, said Ruth Bliss, nutritionist with Community Action Partnership of Kern.

"If it's something that is fried, I still wouldn't call it healthy even if it is corn on the cob," she said.

Albertson's farmers market at the fair could also provide some healthy snacks, Mallory said.

In terms of sweets, she suggested the churro. It has 102 calories and 6.2 grams of fat, compared to the 730-calories cinnamon roll and 760-calories funnel cake.

"They are fairly small, and they're not as dense as the cinnamon rolls," she said.

Here are some other tips:

* Especially with children, decide how many items you'll eat before you get to the fair, Mallory said.

* Share your food, Bliss said. Many of the portions are much larger than someone should tackle alone.

* Skip the condiments. Barbecue sauce can add a lot of extra sugar, Mallory said. Similarly, pass on the extra butter, sour cream and salad dressings if you can, Bliss said.

* You can lighten your load by going for the water or diet soda instead of regular soda and lemonade. And by skimping on the drink, you can splurge on dessert, Mallory said.

* Don't walk into the gate with a huge appetite, they said. Eat before you go.

* Bring some apples and bananas to keep children from eating more than they should, Bliss said.

Many of the fair favorites -- funnel cake, corn dogs and fried Snickers -- come around only once a year, Mallory points out. Indulging is inevitable.

Just consider scarfing down in moderation.

"That's the time when I let myself eat whatever I want," Mallory said. "But I don't eat everything in sight. That could be my downfall."

HEALTHY SNACK CONTEST

Get Moving Kern's Healthy Snack Contest at the Kern County Fair. Children up to 18 years can enter a healthy dish, with their own recipe, to be judged at the county fair. Themes differ by age group, and entries must be low in fat and sugar and have certain amounts of Vitamin A, Vitamin C and fiber. They will be judged on taste, appearance/display, originality/creativity and theme. Entries are accepted until 4 p.m. Sept. 23. Judging will take place at 5 p.m. Go to www.getmovingkern.org for more information.