

Are smoothies really healthy?



Maybe, if you are mindful about the ingredients and portion size.

That's the answer Dana Angelo White, MS, RD, ATC, a registered dietitian, cookbook author, certified athletic trainer and owner of a company that specializes in culinary and sports nutrition will tell you.

White tells clients its all about the ingredients and breaks them down into three easy to remember categories—green light, yellow light and red light—just like a stop light. Green light ingredients provide the optimum combination for a healthy smoothie. According to White these could be fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables, a protein source and a sugar-free liquid. This could be a smoothie comprised from frozen berries, Greek yogurt and coconut water, or a frozen banana with oats, chia seeds and milk. This green light group is what White refers to as the “trifecta of ingredients” because it offers a fluid, antioxidants, fiber and nutrients in a single beverage.

When using yellow light ingredients White cautions they can be delicious but large portions can send the calorie count soaring. Therefore, when adding sweetness try honey or maple syrup but be sure to measure because White says each tablespoon adds 45 calories to the count. For a liquid the addition of coconut milk instead of coconut water will add nine grams of saturated fat per one-quarter cup serving and nuts or nut butters may be healthy but a little goes a long way. Two tablespoons will add another 210 calories to the final count. And, according to White, the ever popular avocado has 250 to 300 calories so they should be used sparingly.

The last and most loved group, the red light category, White considers indulgence ingredients and limited to special occasions. These include ice cream, frozen yogurt, sherbet/sorbet, fruit juice and juice concentrates. So before selecting anything from this group, stop and think before adding to your smoothie.

For other ideas when you're looking for a boost, White offers these suggestions:

- Use brewed green tea or espresso powder for a caffeine additive.
- Coconut water and sea salt add electrolytes.
- Prunes and wheat germ make excellent fiber sources.
- Consider adding chia seeds or flaxseed for omega-3 fats.
- For prebiotics it can be as easy as adding lentils or banana flour and for probiotics try kombucha or kefir.