

A Bagel or a Donut?

Which makes a more healthful breakfast, a bagel with cream cheese or a donut? We put the question to 50 people entering Boston-area Dunkin' Donuts shops on several recent weekday mornings. If you're like the vast majority of them, you'd say the bagel. But you'd be wrong.



True, the bagel has more iron than, say, a chocolate frosted donut—35 percent of the Daily Value as opposed to 4 percent. And the cream cheese contains 10 percent of the Daily Value for vitamin A. But a plain bagel with cream cheese from Dunkin' Donuts also contains 550 calories and 13.5 grams of saturated fat—more than half the saturated fat that should be averaged in a day by someone following a 2,000-calorie diet. The chocolate frosted donut, on the other hand, has just 200 calories—and only 2 grams of saturated fat.

The difference isn't surprising when you consider that bagels at shops like Dunkin' Donuts are huge—about 5 ounces, compared with 2.5 ounces for a jelly donut. (That's why the bagels have more iron; there's more iron-enriched flour.) Dunkin' Donuts bagels also come with 2 ounces of cream cheese instead of 1, racking up calories and saturated fat considerably; every ounce of cream cheese contains about 100 calories. But even smaller bagels with less cream cheese, like the pre-packaged Philadelphia To Go selections recently introduced by Kraft, are no nutritional bargain. One of them—a 2-ounce bagel plus a 1-ounce tub of cream cheese—has 240 calories and 5 grams of saturated fat. That's still more calories and saturated fat than in a Dunkin' Donuts chocolate frosted donut—or jelly donut or French cruller.

Philadelphia To Go bagels with cream cheese are no economic bargain, either. A single one costs \$1. While that's less than you'd pay at Dunkin' Donuts, it's much more than in other areas of the supermarket. A 2-ounce frozen Lender's bagel with 2 ounces of Philadelphia cream cheese from an 8-ounce tub costs just 76 cents. (Smear 1 ounce of cheese instead of 2, and it costs only 49 cents.)

Each Kraft Philadelphia To Go bagel does come with a plastic knife and separate compartments for the bagel and cream cheese so you can grab them on your way out the door. But you have to ask yourself: Is it worth an extra 25 to 50 cents a day not to have to spend the few extra seconds taking a bagel out of a bag and keeping a larger tub of cream cheese in the refrigerator—either at home or the office? It also pays to ask yourself whether breakfast should be a bagel or a donut in the first place.

Building a better breakfast

There's nothing wrong with a bagel and cream cheese for breakfast occasionally—or a donut, either. (We've been known to enjoy them ourselves.) But it's so easy to make breakfast nutritious, not to mention replete with things lacking in the American diet—calcium, fiber, whole grains—that we think it's a shame to forego that opportunity on a regular basis.

For instance, a serving of whole-grain cereal with a cup of skim milk and a cut-up banana or some blueberries will contain at least 300 milligrams of calcium (the Daily Value is 1,000 milligrams), 6 or more grams of fiber (out of the 25 you should aim for daily), plus a host of other nutrients and phytochemicals lacking in the refined grains used to make donuts and just about all bagels. And it'll contain only 300 to 400 calories and hardly any fat.

Ditto for throwing some thawed frozen berries into a cup of low-fat yogurt with a few raisins and a teaspoon of honey for extra sweetness. You can even include a slice of whole-wheat toast with a teaspoon of soft margarine and not go over 400 calories.

An egg cooked in a nonstick pan with a slice of whole-wheat toast, a small glass of skim milk, and a fruit cup makes a healthful breakfast, too.

All of these require a 2- to 5-minute preparation commitment. And they require 5 minutes of sitting at a table to eat. But that's an awfully small time investment to get more of the produce, whole grains, and high-calcium dairy foods that nutritionists keep identifying as key items missing from the American diet. Isn't your body worth 10 minutes a day?