Surprise! Not All Salads Are Equally Healthy

Some salads contain more calories, fat and sodium than others.

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Salads are considered to be one of the healthier food options for folks. But not all salads are as wholesome as people may think, suggests one University of Florida (UF) dietitian.

According to Laura Acosta, MS, a registered dietitian at the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, taco, chef and Caesar salads often contain plenty of calories, fat and sodium.

For example, a typical taco salad has 760 calories, 39 grams of fat, 10 grams of saturated fat—a contributor to heart disease among other health problems—and 1 gram of trans fat.

“One gram doesn’t seem like a lot, but when you consider that organizations like the American Heart Association recommend that even 2 grams of trans fat per day is too much, it helps to put it into perspective,” Acosta said.

Chef salads contain a variety of meats and cheeses. But these meats are commonly processed and loaded with preservatives and can increase a person’s risk of cancer based on how often they’re eaten. Cheese, which offers health perks, is also high in calories, saturated fat and sodium.

Caesar salads combine romaine lettuce drenched in creamy calorie-laden dressing with Parmesan cheese and croutons on top.

Before individuals indulge, Acosta recommends that folks read a salad’s list of ingredients to determine how healthy they are; those watching their calorie intake should opt for house and garden salads.

But these salads pack a lot of calories in what’s poured on your greens, she warns, so dressing should be limited to two tablespoons. (Most dressings contain about 120 to 180 calories per two tablespoons.)

For those unconcerned about cutting calories, Acosta advises trying a simple olive oil and vinegar dressing. These tasty mixtures have the same number of calories as other salad dressings, but they provide fats that help to promote cardiovascular health.

Click here to learn how to master selecting the healthiest choices from the salad bar.

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