

Ask Leyla: Is drinking a smoothie just as good for me as eating the same amount of fruits and veggies?



Q: I really love smoothies and shakes. I have always thought they were a great healthy option for getting in extra produce—especially since I sometimes have a hard time working in my daily servings of fruit and veggies—and a good way to hydrate. But a friend recently told me it’s healthier to eat a salad or bowl of fruit than a smoothie—is that true? And if so, what are your suggestions for the best beverage choices to replace my beloved smoothies.

A: The best beverage of choice is pure filtered water as well as seltzer and mineral waters. These are hydrating, caffeine-free and don’t contain any calories. Runners up are teas like green and Oolong—I like Earl Grey. Unsweetened, of course. Herbal teas offer a great variety of flavors and most are caffeine-free to boot.

When presented with the option of eating that beautiful salad with a fork or blending those colorful vegetables and fruits into a smoothie or juice, I say EAT. There are several reasons.

Eating your food provides more satiety. You will feel fuller eating your salad rather than drinking it predigested out of the blender. Digestion starts in the mouth with mastication (chewing) and the production of salivary amylase which begins breaking down carbohydrates. Your stomach is then charged with churning the contents for digestion and absorption further down in the small intestine. Allowing your *stomach* to digest your food, as opposed to your blender, slows down the absorption of those carbohydrates which is desirable for maintaining stable blood sugar.

Chewing your food is also healthy for teeth and gums—good exercise for your mouth! And the lysozymes in saliva help to break down tartar-forming bacteria. Consider those who NEED to take their nutrition in liquid form—they have poor dentition. Are you training your mouth for that? Remember, what we don’t use, we eventually lose.

I’m not saying never have a smoothie. Smoothies are great—enjoy them. Just make sure you are eating your food most of the time rather than quaffing it down. I don’t recommend meal replacement shakes except for those who need the extra calories due to poor dental health, mouth pain or undesirable weight loss due to poor appetite. Those people are at nutritional risk and a protein shake/smoothie is a good therapeutic option.

To your health!

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