

Navigating the Coffee House

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Somewhere along the way, ordering a cup of coffee has required an entire secondary vocabulary. What was once limited to “cream and sugar?” has now expanded to include all sort of snazzy accoutrements; tall or skinny foams, whipped creams, flavored syrups, etc. And it’s not just the trendy coffeehouses like Starbucks that are guilty; even Dunkin’ Donuts has gotten into the act by serving up their Coolatta line, an enticing blend of java, milk, flavored syrups, and even crushed candy.

With all of these sweet toppings, however, come some hard truths. Many of these coffee drinks are glamorized desserts. If one partakes of all the syrups, whipped creams and whole milk foams, the final libation can weight in at roughly 500 calories and 20 grams of fat! That’s enough to jolt you awake without the caffeine. And with a hefty pricetag (often \$3.00 and up for the snazzier ones), it is hitting both our bottoms and our bottom line.

One of the problems with loading up on sugary, high calorie beverages is that most people do not compensate for these calories by eating fewer calories at meals. Research has shown that liquid calories do not “register” with our brain’s hunger and satiety mechanisms, which means that if you are drinking away lots of extra calories, over the course of a day you are probably consuming more than you thought (or need).

Even if you do try to compensate by watching your portions at your next meal, over the long haul this strategy can backfire; while these beverages may score high points for flavor, many of them score lousy points for nutrition.

Whether you are looking to slurp on a hot or frozen concoction this summer, there are a couple of guidelines that may help you escape with a reasonable amount of calories and fat. Choosing skim milk, for examples, keeps any eye on calories, limits saturated fat, and provides a boost of calcium and vitamins A and D to your day. Consider that a 16 oz Coffee Coolatta with cream from Dunkin’ Donuts packs 410 calories, 22 grams of fat and 50 grams of sugar; over 12 teaspoons! That same Coolatta made with skim milk, however, has only 230 calories and zero fat (the sugar, however, is still high at 51 grams). You can visit www.dunkindonuts.com for a complete nutrition analysis of all their products.

Another way to shave calories from your drink is to pass on the whipped cream, which can trim another 100 calories off of your morning, most of them saturated fat and sugar.



Syrups are another whammy. Most of the mocha flavored drinks are the worst offenders, as they require heavy doses of syrup to conjure up the “white mocha” or “white chocolate” taste. A 20 oz white chocolate mocha made with skim milk from Starbucks boasts a whopping 400 calories, 11 grams of fat, and 39 grams of sugar (10 teaspoons!); if you go for the same drink with whole milk the picture is even grimmer; 480 calories, 20 grams of fat, and 38 grams of sugar. Considering that people often pack away a high calorie scone, donut or muffin with their morning joe, breakfast can easily weight in at 1,000 calories, with a whole day’s worth of eating still to come.

One strategy is to simply try and buy your joe away from home less often. Swinging through Dunkin’ Donuts for a Coolatta once a week is a lot less damaging to both your arteries (and your wallet) than if you partake once a day.

If you find you simply cannot trade the ritual of indulging in your morning concoction, as many of us can’t, then if nothing more try portion control. Ordering the 12 oz version of your favorite drink rather than the 16 oz or the 20 oz will leave you with a bit more room to spare as you start your day. After all, you may just get thirsty this afternoon and want something cool and refreshing.