

The Problem with Smoothies and Juices

If you're reading this right now and thinking "What?? I thought smoothies and juices were the healthiest things ever" you're not alone.

Before we get started let's be very clear on one thing: We are not saying that all juices and smoothies are *bad*. What we are saying is that they should not replace actual *food*, as they have come to do in so many cases.

For those of you who are not super familiar with these trendy drinks, a smoothie is a bunch of fruits and vegetables put into a blender and turned into a thick, pulpy, often very delicious meal-in-a-glass. Juices, on the other hand, are ground up and pressed through a filter to remove the juice from the pulp and fiber, hence removing much of their nutrition in the process.

When it comes to smoothies or juices, L.A.-based chef, author, and T.V. host Chef A.J. sums up our feelings quite nicely:

"It's better to have the fruit, the whole fruit, and nothing but the fruit!"

Let's take a look at why smoothies and juices should not replace food, even if you're super busy.

1. The calories and sugars in juices and smoothies can be off the charts, which your body doesn't really pick up on because of the processed form of the food.

If you're making a smoothie, chances are you're loading up on bananas, throwing in some greens, maybe some coconut milk or coconut water, berries, possibly a protein powder of some kind, and an apple. But think about it: could you sit down and actually *eat* all that food if you were chewing it bite by bite?

Part of the problem with the quantity that you can fit into a smoothie is that your blender chops and mixes it down into a smaller size, which is often then slammed back... and then you marvel at how convenient the whole thing is.

The issue here is that you don't realize just how much food you're actually eating / consuming. If you were to sit down and eat this much food bite by bite, chances are, your satiety signals would kick in much sooner, and you would stop.

But with a smoothie, you're drinking it. It seems harmless because smoothies are the healthiest thing in the world, right? Wrong. Overconsumption - even of fruits and vegetables - places a strain on your digestive system and a stress on your body. Which is why eating slowly and mindfully is such a healthy practice.

With juices, a lot of people end up throwing lots of fruits into their mix because juiced vegetables just don't taste very good. But other popular juice items are sweeter vegetables, including beets and carrots. With either fruits or high-sugar vegetables, when you strip them down to their nectar and take out the fiber, that sugar goes straight to your bloodstream and creates a spike. This is why a recent Harvard School of Public Health investigation found that the consumption

of *whole fruits* is associated with a significantly lower risk of type 2 diabetes, whereas *fruit juice* consumption is associated with a higher risk. (1)

If you do have to choose between smoothies and juices, smoothies are often the better choice, just because they have more of their whole food nutrition intact. (2)

2. Food is meant to be chewed.

When you put food in your mouth, it triggers one of the very first stages of digestion, which happens with the secretion of digestive enzymes in your saliva. The more you eat, the more these enzymes are secreted. Their role is to help you break down the food before it even gets to your stomach. But if you're drinking your food, as with a smoothie, your body is not given the opportunity to create these enzymes. This is why some experts and nutritionists recommend the act of "chewing your smoothie" (3), as they say it can help you break down the food as it's meant to be broken down.

3. Convenience only goes so far

One of the major selling points of juices and smoothies is their convenience. You can pop them in a mason jar or a thermos and have a whole bunch of your day's calories right there waiting for you.

The problem with this is that your food is then often eaten...actually *drunk*...in on-the-go situations, which is far from ideal. When you sit down to eat, your nervous system is given the chance to calm down, which is very important for your digestion. In fact, digestion is one of the first functions that your body will shut down when you're stressed. And even if you don't think you're actually stressed, your body may feel differently. It tends to be the day-to-day stressors - such as being on the phone or working - while you're eating, that can have a number of effects on the strength of your overall digestion. (4)

So even though you may be getting plenty of nutrition *on paper* the actual uptake of the nutrients may not be registering to your stressed body, and the lack of digestive enzymes can inhibit the bioavailability of those nutrients as well.

If you're at your ideal weight, or even if you need to gain some weight, smoothies and juices can be a great solution for a healthy, on-the-go snack. But if you're watching your weight, if you have any stress related conditions, and especially if you do traditionally have weak digestion, you're better off reaching for a whole piece of fruit than going the blended route.

1 - <http://nutritionfacts.org/2016/06/09/juicing-removes-just-fiber/>

2 - <http://nutritionfacts.org/2016/06/09/juicing-removes-just-fiber/>

3 - <http://healthywildandfree.com/are-you-chewing-your-smoothies-juices/>

4 - <http://psychologyofeating.com/4-ways-stress-impacts-digestion/>