



Discretionary choices

'Discretionary choices' are called that because they are not an essential or necessary part of healthy dietary patterns. These foods and drinks appear in the bottom right-hand corner of the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. Discretionary choices are high in kilojoules, saturated fat, added sugars and/or salt or alcohol. Most Australians consume too many discretionary choices instead of choosing foods from the Five Food Groups.

Examples of discretionary choices include: most sweet biscuits, cakes, desserts and pastries; processed meats and sausages; ice-cream and other ice confections; confectionery and chocolate; savoury pastries and pies; commercial burgers; commercially fried foods; potato chips, crisps and other fatty and/or salty snack foods; cream, butter and spreads which are high in saturated fats; sugar-sweetened soft drinks and cordials, sports and energy drinks and alcoholic drinks.

Some common issues that may result in discretionary food include using butter or coconut oil instead of healthier plant-based oils, such as in pastries; adding sugars such as brown sugar, honey, maple syrup or agave syrup to dishes and using cooking techniques such as deep frying.

If chosen, discretionary choices should be eaten only sometimes and in small amounts. While discretionary choices can help contribute to the overall enjoyment of eating, often as part of social activities and family or cultural celebrations, most Australians need to eat these foods less often and in much smaller amounts, and greatly increase physical activity to 'burn off' the added kilojoules from discretionary choices to help prevent gaining excessive weight.



Source: Commonwealth of Australia (2013). Eat for health: Australian Dietary Guidelines Summary, pp. 4, 27
Australian Dietary Guidelines can also be found online at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/n55>