

The Comfort-Food Diet

Enjoy your favorite feel-good foods — without the calories

By Elaine Magee, M.Ph., R.D. for [Woman's Day](#)

Say the words "comfort food" and what comes to mind? Maybe it's piping-hot macaroni and cheese with a crunchy, golden-brown crust, or chewy, gooey chocolate chip cookies warm from the oven. What about a big mound of fluffy white mashed potatoes with a pool of melted butter dripping down the side?

Comfort foods are "feel good" foods. They soothe and nurture us, and encourage that secure, "filled-up" feeling in our stomachs. Just biting into a favorite food takes you back to a time when you felt happy and nourished, loved and cared for.

It's hard to argue with that kind of power, especially considering the world events we've experienced lately. "When we're **anxious** or fearful, we go back to foods we associate with times of lowest stress, that is, with childhood," says John Foreyt, Ph.D., of the Behavioral Medicine Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Unfortunately these foods usually come with a rather steep nutritional price tag: They're often high in fat, calories and sometimes sugar. But many experts say that doesn't mean we must resist comforting ourselves with these foods we crave.

"We shouldn't deny ourselves foods with emotional attachments," assures Rebecca Reeves, Dr.P.H., R.D., an obesity researcher at Baylor College of Medicine. "If we do deprive ourselves, we'll just want to eat more and more."

Keep the Comfort, Lose the Calories

We want our comfort foods, but we also want to keep calories and fat grams in check. Why spend 600 calories and 30 grams of fat on an entrée that will taste just as good and be just as satisfying with 400 calories and 13 grams of fat? "If you can modify comfort foods for fat and calories and still have them taste delicious, then you can enjoy them even more," says Dr. Reeves. But can we truly satisfy our desire for comfort foods without going way over budget in the calorie and fat columns? You bet. With a few tried-and-true kitchen tricks, most comfort foods can successfully survive a major calorie renovation and still keep our taste buds and tummies happy.

Lightening up your favorite comfort foods is all about the three R's: Reduce the amount of high-fat, high-sugar, high-calorie ingredients used in the recipe (don't forget to reduce portion sizes, too!); replace the high-fat and high-sugar ingredients with reduced-fat or reduced-sugar ingredients; and remove some unnecessary high-fat or high-sugar ingredients completely.

With the three R's in mind, we've taken the top three comfort foods and transformed them into dishes equally as comforting but lower in calories and fat (see recipes, below). If you have one serving of each of the top three comfort foods each week, you'll save a total of 332 calories and 39.8 grams of fat by choosing the lighter versions. That means you'll shave off 1,438 calories and 172.4 grams of fat each month, or 17,264 calories and 2,069.6 grams of fat each year.

Reference website: <http://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/food-and-mood/your-attitude/the-comfort-food-diet.aspx>