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Dietitian: Juicing isn't the answer to weight loss

Lori Johnston

Throwing fruits and vegetables into a juicer and drinking a meal is a trendy strategy for folks trying to [shed pounds](#).

In fact, the popularity of juicing – extracting liquid from fruits and vegetables – has created a \$5 billion-a-year industry. Pictures of breakfasts, lunches and dinners in a glass appear daily on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as people show off their expensive high-powered juicers, or what they bought at the juice bar.

But juicing isn't recommended among some experts in the medical and surgical weight-loss community.



Ashley Barrient, a dietitian who specializes in working with weight-loss patients at Loyola Center for Metabolic Surgery and Bariatric Care in Maywood, Ill., discussed with [InsuranceQuotes.com](https://www.insurancequotes.com) why juicing is a poor decision and how people can sustainably and safely lose weight and avoid obesity.

How often do you find patients are juicing?

Most of the people I see that are juicing are doing it at least two meal replacements a day – maybe breakfast and lunch. They think juice is a good way to start liking fruits and vegetables. Maybe for dinner, they're doing a regular meal with whole food. Most people can't sustain that for a week or two weeks. At the end of the day they're not losing weight.

Many people claim to lose weight – at least initially – through juice meal replacements. Why would this be the case for some people?

Initial weight loss is common and research suggests this is due to initial loss of water weight and a significant reduction in caloric intake. However, our bodies cannot sustain this diet for the long-term.

Why can't they sustain the weight loss?

Individuals cannot typically sustain a full juicing diet that extends beyond a few days due to juicing downfalls such as eventual weight plateau, low energy and fatigue, and the lack of fullness and satisfaction associated with consuming only liquids.

When they go to eat their real food, they're starving. They overeat, and maybe (choose) food that is higher in calories. You want a complete meal that includes protein, fruits and vegetables.

(Also) the sugar content and calorie content (of juice) is high because it takes multiple fruit to make juice.

How much higher can the calorie content be?

An average-size fruit is anywhere from 60 to 80 calories. When you're putting that into juice form, you're adding up to two to three different fruits (to get a glass full of juice). Those calories are mainly coming from sugar.

The beneficial part of fruit or vegetables is really the fiber content. The fiber is the crisp part when you bite into an apple or stalk of broccoli. It's the crunch. The fiber causes fullness. That's lost when you turn it into a juice form.

Is there any healthy way to incorporate juicing into a weight-loss effort?

What would be healthy is a snack replacement that's juiced vegetables (such as beets and carrots). A lot of (weight-loss) patients aren't getting the vegetables they need in a day. If that's convenient for them to juice, they are still getting their vitamins and antioxidants. But I find most people add fruit to the juice to make it sweeter and flavor it, which adds so much sugar.

Why can juicing be bad if someone has weight-loss surgery?

We really discourage juicing because the high sugar content can cause "dumping syndrome." When you have a high intake of sugar, the sugar volume dumps into the small intestine really quickly, which causes those symptoms of cold sweats, diarrhea, rapid heartbeat or pulse rate, nausea and uncomfortable abdominal fullness. That's why we discourage a high-sugar diet.

With our patients, we're trying to teach them a healthy diet that's still going to keep them full. The three things that make patients full are adequate hydration through water, adequate intake of leaner, low-fat protein (such as tuna, salmon, turkey, chicken, beans, lentils, nonfat Greek yogurt and nonfat cottage cheese), and adequate intake of fiber from whole fruits and vegetables, not juicing.

What's the biggest obstacle you find among people trying to lose weight?

The biggest thing that we work with patients on is finding healthy coping mechanisms for stress. I think that's a huge barrier to weight loss. We form habits of coping with our stress and relationship issues through food. It's exploring, what other things in my life make me happy [and help me] relax at the end of the day? Use food for what it is: nourishment.

What other steps should people take when trying to shed pounds?

It could be learning healthier choices when dining out or getting more excitement and appreciation from cooking at home. Explore cooking classes and get information about farmers' markets. Learn about health and nutrition-related activities around the city. Approach weight loss with excitement as opposed to a restrictive idea. It's an exciting time to try new foods they haven't tried before.

What's a juicing recommendation for people who are not overweight?

For someone of a healthy weight who is not trying to lose weight, it would be a breakfast replacement, if you add protein to it (such as nonfat, plain Greek yogurt or almond milk). Probably a half cup of juice, which is four ounces, would have the same sugar content as a piece of fruit. It would be OK in moderation.

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