

Are smoothies healthy?

Smoothies have benefitted from a 'health halo' effect, however many smoothies are not as healthy as you might think. Commercially produced smoothies, like fruit juices, are naturally high in sugar. A typical small bottle of fruit smoothie might contain 7 or 8 teaspoons of sugar and while this is usually not added sugar, it is still sugar. In addition, in smoothies you buy in the supermarket, the pasteurisation process destroys some of the vitamin content.

What's the difference between a juice and smoothie and which is better?

Juicing fruit and vegetables removes most of the fibre, leaving behind the vitamins, minerals and sugar. Without fibre, the natural sugars in the fruit can be absorbed very quickly and more easily stored as fat.

In a smoothie the fibre remains in the drink. However it is pulverised by the blending action, partially breaking down and this means that our bodies can absorb the sugar in smoothies more quickly than when we eat a piece of fruit. Adding protein or healthy fats to a smoothie can slow this down.

If you have spent money on a good juicer, make sure you are juicing plenty of vegetables and not just fruit. Otherwise, smoothies made at home are usually a healthier option.

So can a smoothie be healthy?

It is always healthier to eat your vegetables and fruit rather than drinking them, as the whole fruit contains more intact fibre. Research also shows that calories from solid foods keep us fuller than the same calories from liquid foods. But smoothies can still be a way to boost your fruit and veg intake during the day, especially for those who don't like to eat them.

Just make sure to include some vegetables as well as fruit and watch portion size. Leftovers can be stored in the fridge for a few hours or frozen in ice lolly moulds and used for snacks another day. These are a great snack to have while studying.

What equipment do I need?

All you need is a blender. The more powerful the blender, the smoother the smoothie and a Nutribullet or similar machine with a powerful motor will enable you to make smoothies with a wider range of fruit and vegetables. However even a basic hand held blender will work.

Top tips for making smoothies:

1. Don't add sugar, honey or any other sweetener and add water or ice instead of juice.
2. Always include some healthy fat or protein, to help slow down sugar absorption. Try natural yoghurt, cow's milk or other milks, seeds, nut butters or avocado
3. Include some vegetables in your smoothie. Good ones to start with include cucumber, celery, lettuce and spinach. Ideally half of your smoothie should be veg
4. Use spices like fresh ginger, turmeric, cinnamon and vanilla to add natural sweetness and flavour
5. Using frozen fruit or veg will make your smoothie thicker and usually cheaper too

Pina colada smoothie

Preparation time 5 minutes, serves 2

1 cup fresh / frozen pineapple
½ - 1 apple, quartered and deseeded
½ avocado, peeled and stoned
1 cup baby spinach / 1-2 cubes frozen spinach
small piece fresh ginger
1 tbsp. linseeds / protein powder (optional)
2 cups coconut water

- Blend ingredients together. Dilute further with water or more coconut water if necessary
- Add some coconut milk or more avocado for a creamier smoothie

Summer breakfast berry smoothie

Preparation time 5 minutes, serves 2 – 4

2 cups fresh or frozen berries
Handful frozen mango / banana (optional, for added natural sweetness)
½ - 1 cup full fat natural yoghurt
½ - 1 cup baby spinach or 1-2 cubes frozen spinach
1 – 2 tbsp. oats
1 tbsp. linseeds

- Place ingredients in blender with 2 cups of water and blend. Dilute further if necessary. If using fresh fruit and vegetables replace some of the water with ice.

NB The Food Safety Authority of Ireland has confirmed that their recommendation to boil any imported frozen berries for 1 minute before eating is still in place due to the risk of Hepatitis A. However, frozen Irish berries or berries that you have bought fresh and frozen at home are safe to use straight from frozen. Find more information on fsai.ie