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We all scream for ice cream -- Go ahead and indulge, but choose wisely

BY DARLA CARTER • DCARTER@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • JULY 1, 2010

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With the kind of weather we've been having lately, we're not about to tell you that you can't indulge in a cool, tasty treat.

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But here are things to keep in mind when hitting the ice cream aisle at the market or your favorite ice cream parlor.

* That waffle cone may seem like nothing more than an edible decoration, but a large one can add 90 to 160 calories to your order.

If you think having a cone is half the fun, choose a cake or wafer cone (20-25 calories) or a sugar cone (45-50 calories).

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The cake cone might allow you to savor the treat more than if it were in a bowl, said Heather Mangieri, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association.

* Think of ice cream as an occasional treat - not a daily indulgence -- and limit how much you eat at one time.

"If you really, really love ice cream -- and even these premium brands -- one-half cup or one scoop is really what would be a good option," said Mangieri, a registered dietitian in Pittsburgh whose practice is called NutritionCheckUP.

That way, you'll have a better shot at staying under 200 calories (although that's not guaranteed).

* When possible, ask for the kid's size. That way, "you don't have to feel guilty at all," said Karen Ansel, a New York-based registered dietitian and association spokeswoman.

* Pay attention to the terms used to describe the ice cream. If it's "premium" or "superpremium," you can expect plenty of fat.

Mangieri said to also watch out for words such as "rich" and "creamier."

* Go lighter. "There's a lot of light ice cream on the market that actually tastes great -- to the point where if you try some of these, you'll realize you don't even need to buy the full-fat (version) anymore," Ansel said.

At fewer than 120 calories per half-cup in some cases, "that's a perfectly reasonable treat," she said.

Gloria Tsang, editor of HealthCastle.com and a registered dietitian, suggests trying reduced-fat ice cream, which she thinks is tastier than fat-free ice cream and about 120 calories per half-cup, she said.

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A single scoop is often less than 200 calories. The cone can add 20-160 more. Photos.com

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(2 of 2) Other options include frozen yogurt, about 100-120 calories per half-cup, and fruit sorbet, about 70 calories per half-cup.

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Sorbet "can be very satisfying" and is more reasonable than a hot fudge sundae with toppings, Mangieri said.

* Don't assume that just because an ice cream is vanilla that it's got the fewest calories. There are big-name brand vanillas -- such as Haagen-Dazs Vanilla Bean -- that are nearly 300 calories per serving.

Read labels or go online to find the nutrition facts for the flavor/brand you're interested in.

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* Skip typical toppings. "You definitely want to steer clear of hot fudge, caramel, marshmallow toppings ... all those drippy, gooey ones," Ansel said. "They're usually packed with a lot of sugar and fat, too."

Candies, coconut and nuts can add lots of extra calories and fat, Mangieri said.

Mangieri said, "One of my favorite things to do is to puree fresh strawberries," which creates a glaze that can be poured over half a cup of vanilla ice cream to add flavor.

Think outside of the carton. Ice cream isn't the only way to cool off. Among the dietitians' suggestions: Make a granita (a coarse-textured ice dessert) from berries, melon or espresso; create your own Popsicle from fresh juice; freeze fresh fruit, such as berries, tea or bananas, on skewers to create colorful kabobs that can be dipped in a tiny bit of melted chocolate; or grill fruit and add a dollop of light ice cream.

Hankering for a banana split? Prepare to pay. A classic Baskin-Robbins banana split has more than 1,000 calories and 34 grams of fat. A Big Mac has 540 calories and nearly 30 grams of fat.

Buying a large carton of ice cream probably will tempt you to overindulge. Instead, try a single-serve item, such as an ice cream sandwich or a frozen ice pop, Mangieri suggested. A single Fudgsicle is 60-100 calories, depending on size, and a version with no sugar added is about 40 calories.

Eyeing a frosty drink? Tsang warns that some shakes can exceed 1,000 calories.

"You're totally just drinking calories by ordering a shake, so I would say definitely stay away from shakes at the ice cream parlor," she said.

Also, smoothies purchased on the go tend to be overly large and high-calorie. But a homemade smoothie of frozen fruit and skim milk or yogurt can be nutritious as well as flavorful, Mangieri said.

Coffee drinks are another potential trap. Order carelessly and you could end up drinking 600 calories and 35 grams of fat by having something like a Dunkin' Donuts medium Coffee Coolatta with cream.

A skinnier option would be a 12-ounce iced latte with non-fat milk, Ansel said.

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