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The scoop on ice cream Summer treat can be a sin -- or a saint

BY JEMMY LEE, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE JULY 6, 2009

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Glorious, decadent ice cream treats are synonymous with summer -- and some truly startling calorie counts.

Picking your treats wisely, however, can mean the difference between 1,500 calories and a mere 120.

Whatever you do, watch out for the milkshakes.

It's the extras that boost the calories in ice cream treats. Photograph by: Stuart Davis, The Vancouver Sun, Canwest News Service

"Nothing can beat shakes," warns registered dietitian Gloria Tsang of HealthCastle.com. "They are the worst contender for a summer treat. For kids, one milkshake is equivalent to a whole day's worth of calories. For adults, it's at least two meals. Avoid milkshakes, or share them."

But feel free to enjoy your gelato. Gelato is traditionally made with milk rather than cream, and therefore usually contains fewer calories than regular ice cream, Tsang said.

When it comes right down to it, plain old ice cream really isn't all that bad, she says. The trouble comes from all the little extras, such as syrup, sprinkles and whipped cream.

A medium Dairy Queen soft ice cream cone (199 grams) contains 340 calories. Order it dipped in chocolate, however, and you've added 150 calories and 10 grams of saturated and trans fat.

A naked, half-cup scoop of ice cream will run you 150 to 220 calories, but the same ice cream in a waffle bowl with candy or cookie sprinkles, whipped cream and syrup can check in as high as 1,000 calories.

Almonds (typically a 25-gram serving, or about an eighth of a cup) will cost you 150 calories -- about the same calorie count as two regular Oreo cookies. But you'll get healthy fats, some fibre and some protein compared to trans fat, no fibre and no other nutrients in the cookies.

Is premium ice cream better for you? It's likely to be made of fat-rich cream, but ice creams made of milk may contain more additives.

For a little perspective on calorie counts: 300 calories is equivalent to a six-inch submarine sandwich, or to three pieces of fruit such as a banana, an apple and a cup of grapes, or to two cups of pasta without sauce.

And, hey, if you can forsake the cream in ice cream and just go for an ice-cold treat, two skinny Popsicles (the 81-gram Super Twin Popsicle) add up to only 60 calories, and a grande (16-fluid-ounce) Starbucks green ice tea is a conscience-soothing 80 calories.

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