

BEST CHOICES FOR BEVERAGES

By Julie Cottrell, MS, RD, LD

Use this resource to help select the healthiest beverages. **Water, black coffee, and unsweetened tea** are the very **best** choices. As we begin to add flavorings (sugar, sugar alternatives, flavor enhancers and fats in various forms), we transform beverages in ways that may TASTE better, but may not be as beneficial for our health. See if the items shown below can inspire you! For reference, avoid options with **sucralose, aspartame or saccharin**. Better choices: **stevia, monk fruit and allulose**. See [SUGAR AND SUGAR SUBSTITUTES](#) for pictures and more information.

Water	Coffee	Tea	Herbal or Green Tea
			
You can't beat water! It's free, and it hydrates us perfectly. Try "crowding out" other beverages with an equal amount of water. Avoid BPA in plastic containers.	Black coffee is the best choice; if you wish to add creamer or sugar alternatives, make sure they don't contain unfavorable ingredients.	Unsweetened tea is the way to go. Add lemon and acceptable sugar alternatives as desired. A source of antioxidants and phytonutrients.	Available in a variety of flavors, including green tea. Enjoy hot or cold. Rather than snacking on processed "junk foods" at night, try a warm herbal tea instead!
Lemons/Limes	Crystalized Packets Lemon/Lime/Orange	True Lemon Water Enhancer	SweetLeaf Water Drops
			
A simple wedge of lemon or lime can transform your water instantly; often a good choice at restaurants. Avoid adding the pink, blue and yellow packets!	Stir directly into water. Add stevia or monk fruit as desired for additional sweetness. www.truelemon.com	Lots of flavors to choose from! Per packet: 10 calories and 3 g carb (1 g sugar). Sweetened with stevia . Order online or find in stores. Better than Crystal Light!	A water enhancer; comes in a variety of flavors; uses monk fruit and stevia + natural flavors . Available on Amazon or @ www.SweetLeaf.com .
Zevia	Bubly	La Croix	Hint
			
A substitute for most soda flavors; no food coloring; uses stevia + natural flavors . Available in a variety of flavors; if you can't find it locally, visit Amazon or www.zevia.com .	A flavored carbonated water; available in a range of flavors; sold at most stores. No sweeteners in it, uses natural flavors ; comes in caffeinated (dots on the can) and regular (shown above).	A flavored carbonated water; no sweeteners in it, uses natural flavors . Available in a variety of flavors; sold at most stores. A similar option is Waterloo Sparkling Water .	"Water with a touch of fruit flavor"; zero calories per bottle; no sugar substitutes. Ingredients: purified water + natural flavors .

TRY CREATING YOUR OWN FLAVORED WATER!

You can enjoy the flavor of real fruit or veggies without adding sugar or processed “natural flavors”.





Water with Sliced Fruit

Fill a pitcher with water and add slices of cucumber or grapefruit or any other favorite fruit. The flavor will infuse into the water “naturally”.




For more inspiration: [8 Infused Water Recipes](#).

OPTIONS WITH VITAMINS AND/OR ELECTROLYTES:

LMNT	Liquid IV Sugar-Free	IQ MIX ELECTROLYTES	CURE ELECTROLYTE DRINK	VITAMIN WATER ZERO
				
Pronounced “element”; comes in flavored packets; has sodium, potassium and magnesium + natural flavors .	Contains 8 vitamins and nutrients; uses allulose and stevia to sweeten; 5 grams carbs/svg; order online.	Electrolytes + some extras like Lion's Mane ; powder sticks in 4 flavors; non-GMO, uses stevia; 1g carb; natural flavors .	A non-GMO coconut water-based drink mix; 25 calories and 6 g carbs/packet; uses stevia and monk fruit; many flavors.	Available in many flavors. Uses stevia and monk fruit. Choose Vitamin Water Zero for the sugar-free version.

OPTIONS WITH CAFFEINE

OPTIONS OTHER THAN COFFEE AND TEA:

Zevia Energy Drinks	Bubly Bounce	Super Energy
		
Sweetened with stevia; includes natural flavors; 120 mg caffeine per can; order online.	Flavored carbonated water with 35 mg caffeine per can; several flavors.	Sweetened with stevia and monk fruit; 200 mg caffeine per can; several flavors; order online.

How much caffeine is reasonable as part of a healthy diet?






Check out this Healthline article:

[What Is Caffeine, and Is It Good or Bad for Health?](#)

FOR FLAVORING COFFEE

Heavy cream is all the rage on low carb diets. It MAY be a good choice, as long as you are careful about the amount you use. Compare it to these options below. **Organic** is the very best choice for heavy cream or half n half (no growth hormones or antibiotics). These items below represent acceptable options, but other options may also work, as long as the ingredients check out. **Watch out for “sugar-free” creamers** since they often contain unfavorable sugar substitutes.

EXAMPLES OF CREAMERS THAT FIT WELL WITH A LOW-CARB PLAN:

Heavy Cream	Half-n-Half	Silk Half & Half	Nut Pods	MCT Oil Powder
				
Low in carbs and free of sugar substitutes, heavy cream is an ingredient used in many low-carb recipes and in coffee. It has 50 calories per Tbsp; limit to 2 Tbsp per day in your coffee.	An alternative to heavy cream, half n half has only 40 calories per 2 Tbsp. An excellent choice for your coffee or tea if it is creamy enough for your taste.	A combination of oat milk and coconut milk. Per Tbsp: 15 calories, <1 g carb and 1.5 g fat. It's quite tasty and creamy. Available at Walmart if you can't find it elsewhere.	Dairy-free; lots of flavors available; sweetened ones use stevia; also contain natural flavors ; Per tablespoon: 10 calories, 0-2 grams carbs.	MCT oil powder mixes easily into coffee. MCT oil provides energy that isn't usually stored as body fat. Several flavors @ Perfect Keto . Other quality brands: Bulletproof and Sports Research .

Note: It's best to limit total calories from any of these items to about 100 calories/day.

HONORABLE MENTION OPTIONS:

If you aren't aiming for quite as low-carb, but want quality whole-food ingredients, many creamers deserve an “honorable mention”. Most of these use **real sugar** (not sugar substitutes). These won't work during the “fasting window” (most contain 2-5 grams sugar per serving), but could still be part of a lower carb diet/lifestyle. Some may contain sunflower oil (not as bad as soybean, but still not on the favorable list). Below are **examples** of items in this category; **compare ones not shown to these**.

					
Coffee Mate Natural Bliss Sweet Cream	Chobani Coffee Creamer	Fairlife Lactose-Free Vanilla	Califia Farms Oat Milk Creamer	Elmhurst 1925 Hazelnut Oat Milk Creamer	Natural Bliss Almond Milk Creamer Caramel

EXAMPLES OF COFFEE CREAMERS TO AVOID:

<u>COFFEE MATE</u>	<u>INTERNATIONAL DELIGHT</u>	<u>Some of the SKINNY GIRL COFFEE SYRUPS</u>	<u>STARBUCKS ZERO CREAMER</u>
			
<p>WATER, SUGAR, VEGETABLE OIL (HIGH OLEIC SOYBEAN AND/OR HIGH OLEIC CANOLA), AND LESS THAN 2% OF MICELLAR CASEIN (A MILK DERIVATIVE)***, MONO- AND DIGLYCERIDES, DIPOTASSIUM PHOSPHATE, NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL FLAVOR, SALT, CELLULOSE GEL, CELLULOSE GUM, CARRAGEENAN, SUCRALOSE</p>	<p>WATER, PALM OIL, MALTODEXTRIN, CONTAINS 2% OR LESS OF: SODIUM CASEINATE* (A MILK DERIVATIVE), DIPOTASSIUM PHOSPHATE, SODIUM STEAROYL LACTYLATE, MONO AND DIGLYCERIDES, CARRAGEENAN, POLYSORBATE 60, SUCRALOSE, GELLAN GUM, ACESULFAME POTASSIUM, NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS.</p>	<p>INGREDIENTS: Water, Cellulose Gum, Artificial Flavor, Sucralose, Citric Acid, Sodium Acid Sulfate, Acesulfame Potassium, Sodium Benzoate and Potassium Sorbate (Preservatives), Caramel Color.</p>	<p>NONFAT MILK, HEAVY CREAM, VEGETABLE OIL (HIGH OLEIC SOYBEAN OIL), BUTTERMILK, SALT, NATURAL FLAVOR, SUCRALOSE, GELLAN GUM.</p>
<p>This is a commonly used option since it is sold everywhere and hits just the right flavor “notes”. It has only 35 calories/tbsp so it sounds like a good choice. But check out all the highlighted words. It contains sugar, unfavorable vegetable oils (that can cause inflammation), Carrageenan (potentially causes cancer) and sucralose (raises blood sugar and insulin and negatively affects gut bacteria).</p>	<p>International Delight has a variety of products, including “zero sugar” items. An example of one of these is featured above. While this product (International Delight Zero Sugar French Vanilla) has just 20 calories and <1 g carbs per serving, it still has some unfavorable ingredients (see highlighted ingredients above).</p>	<p>Based on the low calorie amount you might assume this to be an excellent choice. Not so!! Check the ingredients list and you may find caramel color, sucralose, lots of preservatives plus acesulfame potassium (another artificial sweetener).</p> <p>Skinny Girl does make a “KETO” line of products that uses favorable sugar alternatives.</p> <p>Here is a link to help you see the actual ingredient lists in the different products they carry.</p>	<p>Starbucks® NON-DAIRY CARAMEL FLAVORED CREAMER belongs in the “Honorable Mentions” category. More favorable oils are used; 5 grams sugar per tablespoon..</p> <p>Avoid the Starbucks Zero line of creamers; it has unfavorable ingredients like soybean oil and sucralose.</p>

SUMMARY OF KEY INGREDIENTS TO WATCH OUT FOR:

- VEGETABLE OIL (Including soybean, sunflower, safflower, canola)
- CARRAGEENAN (a potential carcinogen)
- UNFAVORABLE SWEETENERS (Including sucralose, aspartame, and possibly acesulfame potassium)
- MALTODEXTRIN (and many other words that mean “sugar”)
- CAMEL COLOR (a potential carcinogen)



OTHER BEVERAGES TO LIMIT OR AVOID

BEVERAGES WITH UNFAVORABLE SUGAR SUBSTITUTES

AVOID THESE - They contain <i>sucralose</i> or <i>aspartame</i>
<p>ASPIRE, BANG, CELSIUS, CIRKUL, COUNTRY TIME ZERO SUGAR LEMONADE, CRYSTAL LIGHT, DRIP DROP, GATORADE ZERO, GREAT VALUE SIMPLY CLEAR, ICE, MIO, POWERADE ZERO, PROPEL FITNESS WATER, RED BULL, ZOA, and most sodas/diet sodas/diet tonic water</p>

Note from Julie: I will continue to update this list as new products become available and/or people ask me about them. Recommend to **limit/use caution with items that contain [erythritol](#)** until more research sorts this out. Items to use caution with include: [Bai](#) and [Body Armor Lyte](#)

BEVERAGES WITH SUGAR and LOTS OF CALORIES

Use this chart to compare some of your favorites to see how many carbs you are DRINKING. Liquid calories aren't nearly as "satiating" as food calories. Find ways to reduce or eliminate these items from your diet.

BEVERAGE	AMOUNT	CALORIES	CARBS (grams)	FIBER (grams)
Lemonade - " Simply Light "	1 cup (8 ounces)	25	7	0
Lemonade - " Simply Lemonade "	1 cup (8 ounces)	120	30	0
Juice - orange	1 cup (8 ounces)	112	26	0.5
Juice - " Simply Light " orange juice	1 cup (8 ounces)	50	12	0
Tea - sweet (2 cups sugar/gallon)	1 cup (8 ounces)	96	25	0
Tea - sweet (1 ½ cups sugar/gallon)	1 cup (8 ounces)	73	19	0
Tea - sweet (1 cup sugar/gallon)	1 cup (8 ounces)	48	13	0
Soda/Cola	12 ounces (1 can)	136	35	0
Soda/Cola	20 oz bottle	227	59	0

ALCOHOL

You may or may not be a person who chooses to include alcohol in your life. If you do not use alcohol, you can skip this section. If you do like to include some in your plan, there is a separate PDF titled [ALCOHOL](#) to aid this discussion. For this reason, alcohol will not be further explored here; please discuss this with your healthcare team to find the best plan for you.