Does your diet contain empty calories?

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Whether you count the calories you consume every day, it's important to recognize when you might be filling your body with junk food that provides no nutrients. And, as Jason Howland reports in this Mayo Clinic Minute, many foods and beverages contain empty calories.

Most everything you eat or drink has calories. But what are empty calories?

"Empty calories are basically calories that don't have any added nutritional value, like the vitamins and minerals that we need for our body to function and grow," says Amber Bonsall, a Mayo Clinic dietitian.

A calorie is a unit of energy. It's a way of measuring how much energy your body gets from eating or drinking certain foods and beverages. Too many calories in your diet, especially empty ones, can lead to weight gain.

"Empty calories can be found in things like your candies and sodas, so those things don't really add much to our life," says Bonsall.

While those empty calories might make you feel full and satisfy your cravings, they're doing more harm than good.

"We want to make sure that we're having those foods that are going to add those extra nutritional pieces to our body," she says.

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