



SMARTER CHOICES FOR A BETTER WORLD

Consumer Reports™

RATINGS



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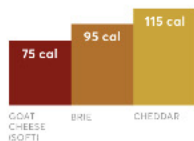
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CHEESE IT! CALORIE COUNTS PER OUNCE



Get the Party Started!

You can enjoy your appetizers with no New Year's regrets if you choose from these 20 tantalizing treats.

by Rachel Meltzer Warren

Clockwise, from top:

SEAPAK BUTTERFLY SHRIMP

31 calories per piece



NUTRITION RATING

WHOLE FOODS MARKET SPINACH & CHEESE SPANAKOPITA

55 calories per piece



NUTRITION RATING

TRADER JOE'S CHICKEN GYOZA POTSTICKERS

29 calories per piece



NUTRITION RATING

SAFFRON ROAD CRISPY SAMOSAS WITH VEGETABLES

45 calories per piece



NUTRITION RATING

PHILLIPS SEAFOOD RESTAURANTS CRAB CAKE MINIS

32 calories per piece



NUTRITION RATING



Product Updates

BY THE TIME you're ringing in the new year, chances are you'll be a few pounds heavier than you were before the holidays—and some research shows that at least part of that extra weight sticks around long after the celebrations are over. Perpetual holiday parties are one factor at fault for people packing on the pounds, especially because they feature trays of tempting hors d'oeuvres—potstickers, spanakopita, samosas, meatballs.... (We'll stop here so that you don't put down the magazine and go whip up some snacks.)

That party staple—frozen appetizers—generally doesn't make anyone's list of good-for-you foods. Farm Rich frozen mozzarella sticks, for example, have 90 calories each, and TGI Fridays cheddar and bacon potato skins contain about 210 calories per 3-piece serving. And let's not even get into the sky-high sodium levels appetizers like these tend to have.

You can't control what's on offer when you're invited to someone else's bash, but when you're hosting, you now have more choices. That's because many brands have begun offering options that seem to be healthy—or at least healthier.

As the onslaught of holiday gatherings begins, we checked out whether these products are, in fact, more healthful and, second, whether they're tasty enough to serve to guests without any apologies or disclaimers.

Our expert tasters ate their way through 72 heat-and-eat hors d'oeuvres that our nutrition experts thought would most likely be on the



Clockwise, from top:

WHOLE FOODS MARKET ARTICHOKE, KALE & SWISS CHARD BITES
23 calories per piece

BIBIGO ORGANIC POTSTICKERS VEGETABLE
31 calories per piece

SAFFRON ROAD CRISPY SAMOSAS WITH SAAG PANEER
40 calories per piece

healthier side, and evaluated them all for nutrition, taste, and price. From that selection, we identified the top 20 appetizers that were both tasty and met or were slightly above our nutritional criteria for a healthy snack (≤ 200 calories, ≤ 5 grams fat, and ≤ 480 milligrams sodium per serving, which in most cases was more than one piece), and calculated a nutrition rating for each. To determine the best bites of the bunch, the panelists did a final blind tasting of those picks to assign flavor ratings, too.

The result? Twenty little bites to consider serving at your next shindig. More than half of them—13, in fact—clocked in at 50 or fewer calories per piece. (They ranged in size from 0.8 ounce to 4.9 ounces.) A reasonable party nosh of four to six pieces of

these healthier finger foods will mean ingesting no more than 300 calories. Choose carefully and you can have a dozen or so for fewer than 500 calories, which should suffice for dinner.

Eight especially stood out for scoring a "very good" on both flavor and nutrition. Serving Whole Foods Market Vegetable Potstickers, Trader Joe's Chicken Gyoza Potstickers, and Bibigo Organic Vegetable Potstickers with a lower-sodium soy sauce sprinkled with chopped scallions for a dip will add flavor and some sodium but hardly any calories. Also highly rated were Saffron Road Crispy Samosas (with Vegetables or Saag Paneer); Whole Foods Market Artichoke, Kale & Swiss Chard Bites; Trader Joe's Thai Joe's Lemongrass Chicken Stix; and SeaPak Butterfly Shrimp.

Party Pleasures

You can eat healthier at any holiday bash by following these strategies.

- **Never go on an empty stomach.** Having a small snack that contains fiber and protein—like a handful of nuts—or even a piece of fruit before you go out to a party stabilizes your blood sugar and takes the edge off hunger.
- **Start munching on lighter fare first.** Hungry people who went to a buffet tended to eat the most of the foods they took first, according to research published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Begin at the veggies tray.
- **Plan ahead.** Don't eat foods you don't really want just because they're right in front of you. Scan all of the offerings before you pick up a plate, then choose the few specialties that you don't get to enjoy every day.
- **Use a salad plate.** Make less look like more. Researchers at Cornell University have found that you can trick your brain into believing you're eating plentiful amounts simply by putting your healthy picks on a smaller plate.

Product	Rating		Nutrition Stats				Price		CR's Take
	Taste	Nutrition	Calories per Piece	Fat per Piece (g)	Saturated Fat per Piece (g)	Sodium per Piece (mg)	Package Size (oz./Cost per Package)	Pieces per Package/Cost per Piece	
Phillips Seafood Restaurants Crab Cake Minis			32	2	<1	65	18/\$12.90	36/\$0.36	Browned exterior with clean, fresh, sweet crabmeat combined with mild seasoning blend and breadcrumbs. Sweet and slightly tangy.
Whole Foods Market Spinach & Cheese Spanakopita			55	3	1.3	130	12/\$5.00	12/\$0.42	Tender, flaky, crispy phyllo exterior with browned butter, fresh spinach, and feta flavors with a hint of onion. Slight heat from black pepper.
Whole Foods Market Vegetable Potstickers			50	1	<1	83	8/\$3.00	8/\$0.38	Browned, crisp bottom with soft filling that tastes mostly of bok choy, cabbage, celery, and green onion.
Trader Joe's Chicken Gyoza Potstickers			29	1	<1	79	16/\$3.00	21/\$0.14	Potsticker with slightly browned bottom and moist filling of chicken, cabbage, onion, garlic, and ginger.
Bibigo Organic Potstickers Vegetable			31	1	0.0	96	32/\$9.00	45/\$0.20	Crispy exterior with soft, minced vegetable filling. Includes mushroom, cabbage, onion, and carrot. Notable fresh ginger flavor.
Saffron Road Crispy Samosas with Vegetables			45	2	<1	60	8.25/\$9.00	12/\$0.75	Flaky, crispy phyllo exterior with potato and spinach filling seasoned with onion and coriander. Mild flavor overall.
Whole Foods Market Artichoke, Kale & Swiss Chard Bites			23	2	<1	63	5.4/\$4.50	9/\$0.50	Artichoke, kale, and Parmesan cheese with slight onion and garlic flavors. Soft, slightly chewy interior. Very slightly bitter.
Saffron Road Crispy Samosas with Saag Paneer			40	2	<1	63	8.25/\$9.00	12/\$0.75	Flaky, crispy phyllo exterior with mostly spinach and big Indian spice flavors. Tastes more of spice than spinach.
Thai Joe's (Trader Joe's) Lemongrass Chicken Stix			50	2	<1	100	8.8/\$3.30	10/\$0.33	Crispy, tender exterior with moist, chewy filling with distinct lemongrass and mild chicken flavor. Ginger and floral notes, and some spicy heat.
SeaPak Butterfly Shrimp			31	2	<1	46	20/\$9.00	49/\$0.18	Whole shrimp with attached tail that's heavily breaded. Breading has a browned flavor and is crunchy with slightly soft shrimp interior. Clean shrimp flavor.
Tyson any'izers Popcorn Chicken			43	2	<1	150	25.5/\$7.50	27/\$0.28	Crispy, crunchy exterior with tender chicken. Somewhat salty. Garlic and black pepper add spicy heat.
Trader Joe's Spinach & Kale Bites			35	2	1.0	98	7.5/\$4.00	10/\$0.40	Browned exterior. Fresh-tasting spinach with slight kale and mild cheese flavor. Onion, garlic, and black pepper flavors.
Whole Foods Market Potato & Pea Samosas			75	3	<1	160	7.5/\$2.70	8/\$0.34	Browned, slightly toasty pastry exterior. Indian spice flavors dominate; the potatoes and peas add little to overall flavor. Spicy heat lingers.
Pagoda Vegetable Egg Rolls			140	4	1.0	460	12.27/\$3.00	4/\$0.75	Large egg roll with crispy exterior with soft, minced vegetable filling that includes cabbage, onion, and carrot. Moist and flavorful with some spicy heat.
Trader Joe's Spanakopita			53	3	1.0	140	12/\$4.00	12/\$0.33	Flaky, crispy phyllo exterior with fresh-tasting spinach, feta, slight onion, and toasted browned flavors.
Trader Joe's Handcrafted Vegetable Samosas			60	3	1.5	120	8.5/\$3.00	12/\$0.25	Tender pastry filled with potato and vegetables with flavorful Indian spices. Notable coriander.
Cuisine Adventures Spanakopita			75	5	1.5	135	48/\$14.80	48/\$0.31	Flaky, crispy browned phyllo exterior with big, fresh spinach taste, mild feta, and a hint of nutmeg.
Nate's Meatless Meatballs Zesty Italian			37	2	0.0	110	10.5/\$5.50	21/\$0.26	Soft and tender meatless meatball that tastes like breadcrumbs, dehydrated Italian spice blend, onion, garlic, and browned flavor.
Trader Joe's Tofu Edamame Nuggets			55	4	<1	85	12.35/\$3.00	14/\$0.21	Slightly browned breaded exterior; soft inside. Sweet with edamame pieces. Mild flavor overall. Carrot pieces had little flavor.
Aidells Chicken Meatballs Teriyaki & Pineapple			47	3	1.0	140	46/\$13.40	60/\$0.22	Chicken-flavored meatball that's moist and chewy but somewhat spongy. Sweet with caramelized and teriyaki flavors. Slight heat.

HOW WE TEST: CR shoppers were asked to look for party foods that appeared to be healthy (based on a quick review of the ingredients and/or Nutrition Facts labels) primarily at

four major supermarkets that tend to carry a large selection of appetizers: Costco, Trader Joe's, Walmart, and Whole Foods. Our trained taste panelists screened

72 products to find the best-tasting. Then our nutrition experts selected the ones that met or were just slightly above our nutrition criteria for a healthy snack (≤200 calories,

≤5 grams fat, and ≤480 milligrams sodium per serving) and those products were tasted again. Serving sizes were variable—one to seven pieces.