

# Healthy Pizza?

## A Simple Substitute to Turn America's Favorite Meal from Fattening to Flattering.

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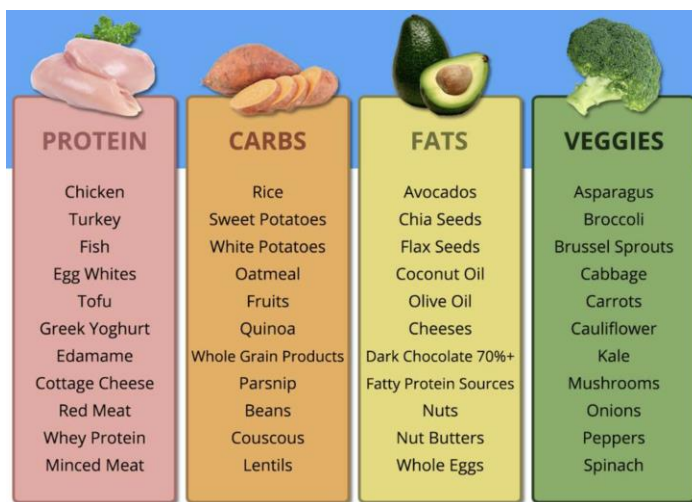
OHSU Medical Students

The Standard American Diet, aptly abbreviated SAD, is troubled by high proportions of processed foods, red meats and added sugars which contribute to heart disease, diabetes and other health issues. The dietary quality index was created to reflect the percentage of calories that come from unprocessed plant foods with a scale from 0-100 and the SAD scores an 11<sup>1</sup>. There is a clear lack of vegetable use that needs to be addressed. One of the unhealthiest foods in the SAD is pizza. It often contains little or no vegetables and is made of highly processed food, rich in fats and refined carbohydrates.

Based on polls, Americans eat 3 billion pizzas each year (9 pizzas per year for every American). This means that on any single day up to 13% of the population is eating pizza. Due to its high popularity and many topping combinations, pizza presents an opportunity to make a large impact on the health of Americans. In this article, we break down the nutrition of a pizza into bite sized pieces and offer healthy and affordable substitutes, so we can all enjoy this tasty treat without guilt that comes with a fatty, refined carbohydrate-filled meal.

### Macronutrients, Micro-Problems

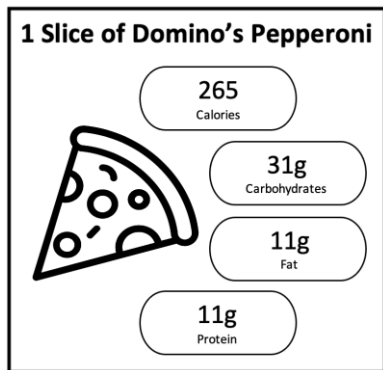
Before we can understand pizza, we need to understand nutrients. When we take a more detailed look at calories, there are three macronutrients that provide calories: carbohydrates, fats, and proteins<sup>1</sup>. Stating it simply, the foods we eat consist of a combination of these three macronutrients and every person needs a different number of macronutrients in their daily diet. Commonly, the SAD contains high amounts of carbohydrates and fats, which increases fat storage<sup>1</sup>. Highly refined carbohydrates can also negatively affect diabetes because they cause large, fast rises in blood sugar which are difficult to control, even with insulin<sup>2</sup>. Fat also directly decreases your body's ability to respond to insulin<sup>2</sup>.



PROTEIN	CARBS	FATS	VEGGIES
Chicken	Rice	Avocados	Asparagus
Turkey	Sweet Potatoes	Chia Seeds	Broccoli
Fish	White Potatoes	Flax Seeds	Brussel Sprouts
Egg Whites	Oatmeal	Coconut Oil	Cabbage
Tofu	Fruits	Olive Oil	Carrots
Greek Yoghurt	Quinoa	Cheeses	Cauliflower
Edamame	Whole Grain Products	Dark Chocolate 70%+	Kale
Cottage Cheese	Parsnip	Fatty Protein Sources	Mushrooms
Red Meat	Beans	Nuts	Onions
Whey Protein	Couscous	Nut Butters	Peppers
Minced Meat	Lentils	Whole Eggs	Spinach

Being aware of this issue can be important to giving your body the nutrients it needs and unlocking your healthiest self. But hey, these things can be confusing, right? If not, everyone would be healthy and fit. Hopefully this article can take some of the mystery away and help you in your first steps. A great resource to investigate how much of each macronutrient your body needs can be found with online macronutrient calculators. These can help individuals calculate calorie and macronutrient goals and if paired with free phone apps, such as *My Fitness Pal* or *Lose It*, can help you track your intake and nutrients so you know exactly where your diet may fall short. Being aware of this concept and some simple tools can really kick-start that terrifying health journey by giving your body the fuel it needs. But we are here to talk about pizza, so let's get started.

## Anatomy of A Pizza



Pizza is made of crust, sauce, cheese, and toppings. All of these can be made healthier. Your typical store-bought 12" frozen crust alone has 1,120 calories with 200 carbohydrates (Table 1)<sup>3</sup>. Add tomato sauce, cheese, and pepperoni (the most common topping) and you are looking at a pizza with over 1,500 calories and not even a single vegetable, which is more than a day's worth of calories for most women<sup>3</sup>. Thin crust isn't much healthier. What's worse is that many Americans don't understand that buying pizza from a popular restaurant, such as Domino's Pizza® or Little Caesars®, has more calories. Eating just two slices of a medium Domino's Pizza is over 500 calories, which is ¼ of the daily 2,000 calorie recommendation<sup>3</sup>. Let's be honest, who really only eats two slices of pizza anyway? Check out Table 2 to see differences

between pepperoni pizzas to get an idea how making small changes to toppings or choosing cauliflower crust can really improve your health. It is the sad reality for pizza lovers everywhere.

**Table 1. Macronutrient Comparison of 12" Pizza Crust**

	Standard	Thin	Cauliflower
<b>Calories (Cal)</b>	1120	850	800
<b>Carbs (g)</b>	200	140	140
<b>Protein (g)</b>	40	30	30
<b>Fats (g)</b>	20	17.5	15

### Cutting Calories, Boosting Veggies

There are several ways to lower calories and increase nutrients in your diet while still enjoying one of America's favorite tasty meals. The obvious way is to eat less pizza! Mentally limiting yourself to a certain number of slices can reduce calories. Another tip is to eat something as a side. I know what you are thinking, but nope, not those buttery breadsticks covered in marinara sauce! Eating a salad with a glass of water (not soda) before you start eating pizza will help increase your veggies and slow down your desire to destroy that entire pie after a long day of work. You can also use healthy substitutes such as cauliflower crust instead of traditional crust, which lowers calories by nearly half and has 2.5 servings of vegetables per 12" pizza<sup>3</sup>.

Pizza toppings are another area where you can keep that delicious pizza flavor but make it healthy. Looking at Table 3, we see that pepperoni and sausage, the most common toppings, are also the least healthy. They add 140 and 360 calories and are high in saturated fat<sup>3</sup>. Choosing healthier options such as chicken, tomatoes, olives, peppers, and mushrooms are able to add lots of flavor and increase vegetables. We aren't telling you to ditch all of your favorites, but simply try substituting one or two of them for a healthier meat or a vegetable. Making these small changes can keep calories lower and give your body key nutrients! Doesn't that sound like a steal?

**Table 2. Macronutrient Comparison of 12" Pepperoni Pizzas Bought from Various Locations**

	Popular Pizza Restaurants		Store Bought		
	Domino's	Little Caesar's	Standard Crust	Thin Crust	Cauliflower Crust
<b>Calories (Cal)</b>	2124	2131	1520	1500	984
<b>Carbs (g)</b>	248	233	156	140	108
<b>Protein (g)</b>	87	104	60	70	33.6
<b>Fats (g)</b>	87	87	72	75	48

**Table 3. Macronutrient Comparison of Popular Topping Choices per 12" Pizza**

	Meat				Non-Meat Options			
	Sausage	Pepperoni	Canadian Bacon	Chicken	Green Peppers	Olives	Tomatoes	Mushrooms
<b>Calories (Cal)</b>	340	140	60	55	13	88	14	10
<b>Carbs (g)</b>	8	1	1	80	3	5	3	2
<b>Protein (g)</b>	20	3	10	0	0	1	1	2
<b>Fats (g)</b>	26	6	1	18	0	8	0	0

**Does it make Cents?**

It sounds nice to just have healthier pizza, but does it cost the same? Can I get a cauliflower crust pizza for the same price as traditional? Can I get it hot and ready? Pizza can be bought in a restaurant, at a store, or made in your home. Restaurants, such as Domino’s and Little Caesar’s, often sell 12”-14” pepperoni pizzas for \$6-8 depending on the current deals. Of course, more toppings and stuffed crust increase the overall cost. The same pizza in a store, such as Fred Meyer or Walmart, can be found for around \$5-6. Sadly, very few pizza chains have cauliflower crust options, but grocery stores have cauliflower crust 12” pizzas with vegetables, which are usually sold for \$8. But we have a better idea. Why not save more while creating a healthy, fun, family-oriented activity by making pizzas at home? In Coos Bay, you can buy cauliflower crusts for \$4, which is the same price as regular and thin crusts. Adding pizza sauce, mozzarella cheese, and everyone’s favorite toppings will only cost \$6-7 per pizza.

**No Matter How You Slice It**

The pizza industry has spent millions of dollars making unhealthy pizza convenient and affordable. It is difficult for healthy alternatives to compete. However, being able to purchase or create your own 12” cauliflower crusted pizza with healthy toppings for \$6-8 is not unreasonable and goes a long way to better your health.

**Key Take-Aways:**

1. Pizza is the perfect unhealthy storm of high calories, high refined carbohydrates, and low vegetables.
2. Watch or even track the amount of calories and macronutrients you eat.
3. Every time you eat pizza, add veggies! Top with veggies or eat salad or a vegetable-based side.
4. Mentally limit yourself to a certain number of pieces.
5. Try choosing a cauliflower crust and use chicken and veggie toppings instead of fatty meats.

**References:**

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