

## **Fact Sheet**

### About the Meal Upgrade Calculator

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, two-thirds of American adults and nearly one in three children are overweight or obese and face increased odds of getting diabetes, heart disease and other serious medical conditions.

To change this situation, First Lady Michelle Obama, the current and all living former U.S. Surgeons General and many other health leaders are speaking very publicly about the need for Americans to make better food choices. The big question is how consumers, especially busy moms, can make improvements to family dishes when they're stretched for time, on a tight budget, and must contend with family taste preferences.

Now, there is a way to solve this dilemma. It's called the *Meal Upgrade Calculator* – a Web-based tool that shows consumers how to “upgrade” favorite meals by changing the type of meat and poultry, the side dishes and even the condiments to decrease the amount of fat and calories in breakfast, lunch and dinner menus. Developed by Shape Up America! and National Turkey Federation (NTF), the calculator features 24 different meals where simple “upgrades” will improve the nutritional profile. Each time the “upgrade” is selected, the calculator shows the amount of fat and calories saved.

To design the *Meal Upgrade Calculator*, a team of Shape Up America! nutritionists first selected 4 breakfasts, 10 lunches and 10 dinner options to feature on the Web site, using the following criteria: 1) the meals are easy to prepare, 2) the dishes are economical; and 3) the dishes are frequently served in American households. The next step was to map out a range of easy modifications to each meal that would improve the nutritional profile. Here, the researchers agreed that the first change would be to substitute the meat protein with turkey, which is nutrient-rich, low in fat and calories, and is considered an excellent protein source. Other potential “upgrades” entailed altering the side dishes, switching to higher fiber breads and changing the condiments.

Once the team mapped out the possible changes in the 24 meals, they used a nutrition database to chart the nutritional savings associated with each “upgrade.” In each case, the nutritionists started with the total number of calories, fat and saturated fat in the original meal and then subtracted the savings achieved by each “upgrade.” Thus, people using the calculator will first see the savings from “upgrading” another meat protein to turkey, which was chosen by Shape Up America! because this meat is nutrient-rich, low in fat and calories and can be easily substituted for a number of other meat products, such as ground beef and sausage. Following this change, consumers will then have the option of making a series of other “upgrades” to the meal, each time seeing what these changes produce in terms of less fat and calories.

For ease of use, the *Meal Upgrade Calculator* takes the visitor through a step-by-step process, starting with the selection of the meal occasion (breakfast, lunch or dinner). After making this choice, the visitor is taken to a page where photos of the different meals are featured. To select the specific dish, the consumer clicks on an “Upgrade It!” button and immediately sees the impact of “upgrading” the meat to turkey. This is followed by a series of prompts where the visitor is presented with a range of choices, each time seeing how the change lowers the fat and calories. Then, at the end of the process, the site provides links to the “upgraded” turkey recipe as well as links to similar recipes.

Considered a teaching tool as well as a calculator, the *Meal Upgrade Calculator* uses each meal occasion to provide simple tips on healthy eating and meal preparation. Moreover, the site poses the question, “What If Everyone Upgraded?” so Americans can appreciate the cumulative benefits of small dietary changes. Here, the site summarizes new research findings from Shape Up America! that show by just changing the meat to turkey in a family meal nets an average savings of 108 calories per eating occasion.

The *Meal Upgrade Calculator* is available on the Web sites of both Shape Up America! and NTF at [www.shapeup.org](http://www.shapeup.org) and [www.EatTurkey.com](http://www.EatTurkey.com). Intended to be expanded over time with additional meals, recipes and cooking tips, the calculator will also be promoted widely to nutrition educators and health professionals with the goal of using this new tool to counsel families about healthier eating.

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