**Back to the Basics in Nutrition**
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**What is a Calorie?** A Calorie is a unit of energy measurement.  The amount of energy a food or beverage may provide is how its number of Calories is determined.

**Where do Calories Come From?**  Calories in food come from macronutrients: carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. Each macronutrient has a standard number of Calories. Carbohydrates have 4 Calories per gram, proteins have 4 Calories per gram, and fats have 9 Calories per gram.  For a point of reference, since we generally don't think in terms of "grams", a gram of sugar is the equivalent of ¼ teaspoon.

**How Many Calories Should People Consume?**  The number of Calories that a person should consume depends on a variety of factors, including age, gender, and activity level. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, provides a chart to determine an estimate of our needs.

The website for suggested Calorie needs is found at:
https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/appendix-2/

**When it comes to Nutrition, is a Calorie a Calorie?** There are two categories of Calories when referring to nutrition: empty Calories and nutrient-dense Calories.

Empty Calories contain few to no nutrients. Nutrients include carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins and minerals. Foods with empty Calories tend to be high in refined carbohydrates and/or solid fats and they provide energy but little else in the way of quality nutrition. Empty-Calorie foods and drinks include candy, chips, white bread, and soda.

Nutrient-dense Calories contain energy, plus vitamins and minerals (and in some cases, fiber) that supports the growth and maintenance of bones, muscles and the multiple systems of the body. Nutrient-dense Calorie foods include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, and low-fat dairy. Choosing nutrient-dense Calories most often promotes optimal health.

**The Bottom Line Regarding Calories:**  Calories are in most foods and drinks that we consume. Calories can include essential nutrients or be devoid of them. Choosing foods and drinks that contain nutrient-dense calories most often contributes to wellness.  Alternatively, choosing foods and drinks with empty calories most often contributes to health risk factors including obesity, hypertension, and high blood cholesterol.

(Recipe to include with article on next page.)

## Mediterranean Chef Salad

Serves 2 | Serving Size: 3 cups
Total Time: 10 min | Prep: 10 min | Cook: 0 min
This filling salad is packed with healthful ingredients.

Ingredients:
2 cups ready-to-serve romaine lettuce
2/3 cup chopped fresh carrots
16 grape tomatoes
1/2 cup red seedless grapes cut in half
1/2 cup boiled chick beans (can use canned)
2 teaspoons crumbled feta cheese
1/2 teaspoon olive oil
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
1 tablespoon fresh-squeezed lemon juice
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
1 tablespoon fresh-chopped parsley
Directions:
Toss lettuce, carrots, tomatoes, grapes, and chick peas in large salad bowl. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Toss with oil, vinegar, and seasonings just before serving. Top each salad with a teaspoon of finely crumbled feta cheese.
Chef's Tips:
If you use canned chickpeas, be sure to rinse and drain them thoroughly before adding them to the salad. Add chopped mint for a nice flavor garnish or use whole wheat pita triangles.
Source:  Communicating Food for Health

For more information on this or other foods and nutrition topics, contact the Marais des Cygnes Extension District office at 913-294-4306 or 913-795-2829 or write to: dburnett@ksu.edu