

Are KIND Bars Bad For You? Nutritionists Weigh In On The FDA Ruling Some Bars "Unhealthy"

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“We need to look at actual serving sizes, not 40g,” nutritionist and author of *The Small Change Diet*, Keri Gans, RDN, tells me when I ask the question on everybody’s mind: Can KIND bars be considered health food? Until this month, you probably considered KIND bars good for you, like grabbing a piece of fruit on the go. But on April 2, the FDA wrote a letter to KIND about the “mislabeling” of some of its bars — as

“healthy.”

For me, when I first stumbled across a KIND bar, I thought it was a lifesaver. “Someone made a healthy snack that actually tastes good?” I thought to myself. “Hallelujah!” I raised the roof. Sometimes, I go for a KIND bar not because I’m trying to be health-conscious, but because I actually really, really want one. The fact that it seemed like a healthy snack is just icing on the cake (an unfortunate metaphor in this case. Mm. Cake). Anyway, now the FDA has essentially shattered that perception with its warning.

So, does this mean that KIND bars are, in fact, unhealthy? The short answer is, according to Gans, no. She explains: “For a grab-and-go snack, a KIND bar is still an excellent option. Its ingredients provide nutrition, which is a lot more than I could say about many snack foods.”

However, the FDA’s letter made clear that four of KIND’s products did not meet the agency’s regulations to bear the “healthy” label on their packaging.



In its warning letter, the FDA called out four specific flavors of KIND bars as failing to meet its requirements for the “healthy” label:

- KIND Fruit & Nut Almond & Apricot
- KIND Fruit & Nut Almond & Coconut
- KIND Plus Peanut Butter Dark Chocolate + Protein
- KIND Fruit & Nut Dark Chocolate Cherry Cashew + Antioxidants

More specifically, the FDA wrote that these four bars had too much saturated fat and not enough antioxidant vitamins to qualify them as healthy. The FDA noted that these products had labels that “bear nutrient content claims, but the products do not

meet the requirements to make such claims.” According to its regulations, a food item must contain 1g of saturated fat or less per 40g in order for it to market itself as “healthy.”

The letter then points out that the four above-mentioned products all exceed the 1g limit.

- The KIND Fruit & Nut Almond & Apricot product contains **3.5g of saturated fat** per 40g
- The KIND Fruit & Nut Almond & Coconut product contains **5g of saturated fat** per 40g
- The KIND Plus Peanut Butter Dark Chocolate + Protein product contains **3.5 g of saturated fat** per 40g
- The KIND Fruit & Nut Dark Chocolate Cherry Cashew + Antioxidants contains **2.5 g of saturated fat** per 40g



So, yeah, these bars do indeed exceed the 1g of saturated fat per 40g of food restriction, and if the FDA says 1g per 40g is a healthy amount, who am I to argue with a government agency? *However*. Just focusing on these figures alone would be like missing the forest for the trees.

When Bustle reached out to KIND for comment, Joe Cohen, the company’s senior vice president of communications, noted:

Nuts, key ingredients in many of our snacks and one of the things that make fans love our bars, contain nutritious fats that exceed the amount allowed under the FDA’s standard. There is an overwhelming body of scientific evidence supporting that nuts are wholesome and nutritious. This is similar to other foods

that do not meet the standard for use of the term healthy, but are generally considered to be good for you like avocados, salmon and eggs. Our team at KIND is fully committed to working alongside the FDA, and we’re moving quickly to comply with its request.

I also reached out to nutrition experts, like Gans, and asked them to expound on these numbers. I want to know where KIND bars stand, exactly, compared to widely recognized “health” foods. One thing I learned? If KIND bars can’t wear the “healthy” label, then neither can avocados (see how important perspective is?).



How Much Saturated Fat Do KIND Bars Have Compared To Health Foods?

The FDA uses 40g as a benchmark here for measuring what the healthy amount of saturated fat is because that's the serving size KIND uses — it's equivalent to one bar. But 40g is not the serving size of every food, and when compared to the serving size of other healthier foods, KIND bars' saturated fat content is hardly newsworthy. If you were to compare the saturated fat content of the aforementioned KIND bars with the serving sizes of supposedly healthier

foods, it looks like this.

- Half of one medium avocado (70g) has **2g** of saturated fat
- Three ounces (85g) of salmon has **2.6g** of saturated fat
- One ounce (28.4g) of mixed nuts (peanuts, cashews, almonds, walnuts, etc.) has **2.5g** of saturated fat
- One tablespoon (15g) of olive oil has **2.1g** of saturated fat
- Three ounces (85g) of firm tofu has **.5g** saturated fat
- Two tablespoons (30g) of peanut butter has **3.3g** saturated fat
- One cup (236.5g) of plain soy milk has **.5g** saturated fat

With the exception of tofu and soy milk, all of these foods have comparable amounts of saturated fat to the KIND bars in the FDA's letter.



As for the two healthiest foods on the list above, tofu and soy milk, you can see that 40g is hardly the normal serving size for either product.

When comparing the 40g serving size of KIND bars to the actual serving sizes of healthy foods, some of the bars do have more saturated fat — but might not have enough to warrant the kind of stern warning that might be more fitting if, say, chocolate tried to use the “healthy label.”

Some Saturated Fats Are Actually Good For You



Certain foods have high fat content but are good for you — they're known as “healthy fats.” These include salmon, avocados, olive oil, eggs, and nuts. The latter is where KIND bars get most of their saturated fat. As the company noted in its statement, the saturated fat content of nuts exceed the amount that the FDA considers “healthy,” but

some nutrition experts consider these fats to be good for you, regardless.

According to Dr. Keith Kantor, a leading nutritionist and author of *The Green Box League of Nutritious Justice*, avoiding saturated fats could actually be detrimental, as they play a vital role in our bodies. “Our body does require some daily intake of saturated fat,” he says. “Saturated fats help make up the membrane of the cellular structures in the body... It also helps regulate hormone production.”

Franci Cohen, a certified New York fitness trainer and exercise physiologist, named an entirely different set of benefits to saturated fats. Firstly, they can actually help reduce your chances of heart disease, contrary to the public opinion. “Saturated fat in the diet reduces the levels of a substance called lipoprotein that correlates strongly with risk for heart disease,” she says.

And a surprising side effect? Weight loss. “Research has shown that when people (specifically women) diet, those eating more of their total fat as saturated fat lose the most weight,” she added. Saturated fats can also help strengthen bones, she says: “Saturated fat is required for calcium to be effectively absorbed into bone.”

Also, your liver will also thank you for consuming these fats. Cohen explains: “Saturated fat has been proven to shield the liver from the damaging effects of alcohol and medications used for pain and arthritis.”

That said, saturated fats still need to be consumed in moderation. They may have healthy benefits, but saturated fats got their bad rap for a reason — and the FDA doesn’t enforce their regulations just for fun. Gans notes that “according to the American Heart Association, we should consume between 25 and 35 percent of our total daily calories as fats.”

So, let’s take the KIND bar with the most saturated fat, the Fruit & Nut Almond & Coconut flavor, to put the American Heart Association’s recommendation in context. One of these bars has 5g of saturated fat and of its total 190 calories, 100 are from fat. If you’re consuming a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet, then 100 fat calories would be 5 percent of 2,000 calories. So, you’d be able to eat five to seven of these bars to reach the association’s recommended daily amount of fat calories (of course, that’s assuming you’re not consuming fats from anywhere else). Any more than seven of these KIND Fruit & Nut Almond & Coconut bars and you’d be exceeding that limit.



So, Do KIND Bars Really Have A Ton Of Antioxidants?

In addition to the “healthy” label, the FDA took issue with KIND’s use of the “+” symbol, which is used to indicate that a food contains at least 10 percent more of the Reference Daily Intake (RDI) or Daily Reference Value (DRV) for the nutrient than an appropriate reference food. In other words, a particular orange juice brand that

has 10 percent more calcium than the average orange juice brand is permitted to use the “+” symbol when listing “+ calcium” on its carton.

The FDA wrote in its letter that the bars that use the “+” in their names, the KIND Peanut Butter Dark Chocolate + Protein and KIND Dark Chocolate Cherry Cashew + Antioxidants, do not comply with this regulation. Thus, what the FDA is saying here is that KIND bars don’t have at least 10 percent more protein or antioxidants than a regular snack bar.

So, let’s compare KIND bars to other similar bars. Each KIND Peanut Butter Dark Chocolate + Protein bar has 7g of protein, but Zing chocolate coconut nutrition bars have 10g of protein each. And ZonePerfect’s Chocolate Almond Raisin bars have 15g of protein each. So, the FDA has a point when it comes to KIND’s use of the + symbol when advertising its protein content.

And as for dietary antioxidants, which include vitamins A, C, and E, the KIND Dark Chocolate Cherry Cashew + Antioxidants bar contains 50 percent of the Daily Value (DV) of vitamins A, C, and E. That is definitely at least 10 percent more than Larabar’s Cherry Pie Fruit & Nut Bar, which has 10 percent of the Daily Value (DV) of vitamin E, but zero percent of vitamins A and C. And as for the equally popular Clif bar, its Coconut Almond Peanut Trail Mix Bar has 15 percent vitamin E but also 0 percent vitamin A and C.



While KIND bars might have more antioxidants than other snack bars, they still shouldn’t be considered a good source of antioxidants when you’re comparing them to all foods. When I asked Dr. Kantor to name some foods that were widely agreed to be rich in antioxidants and how much antioxidants they

contained exactly, his answers made the Peanut Butter Dark Chocolate + Protein bar’s content seem... very, very small. Blueberries, for example, are very rich in antioxidants, containing 23.4 percent of vitamin C, while spinach contains 56.3 percent of vitamin A and 14 percent of vitamin C. As far as American snacks go, even when compared to other similar nutrition bars, KIND bars still seem to be a pretty healthy choice. After looking at the whole context of this KIND bar controversy, I’ve decided not to let the FDA’s warning deter me from grabbing a KIND bar when I’m feeling peckish. But something else that I’ve learned from talking to the nutritionists is that no matter how healthy a snack bar is, it can’t substitute healthy whole foods. So if KIND really wanted us to be kind to our bodies, it would tell us to eat our fruits and vegetables too.