

Food Strategies

When and how you eat does make a difference. Here are some strategies that can make it easier to eat well. Experiment to find those strategies that can help you get the most pleasure *and* the most health from your food.

Eat Enough

- When you eat too few calories your metabolic rate drops by 10 – 20% (150 – 300 kcal). This means that you burn less calories; you can starve yourself and still not lose weight.
- Often people eat too little at meal time and then later snack on whatever is closest. Eating regular meals and enough at meals really cuts down on unconscious eating later.
- Eating more at meals means you get more of the nutritious food choices and less empty calorie.
- *Right Size* your meals – find the level of fullness that lasts for a few hours without making you feel stuffed.

Meal Timing

- Going too long without food doesn't work for most of us. Plan on three regular meals and 1- 3 snacks.
- People who skip breakfast tend to eat more in the long run. They are not hungry in the morning, but once they finally start eating it is hard to stop. It is also harder to make wise choices.
- Notice when you are hungry and plan snacks during those periods, typically 3 – 4 hours after a meal. Have the snack *before* you are starving.

Plan your Meals and Snacks

- Plan ahead. Don't just start reaching for food when you get hungry.
- It often helps to have a list of snack foods: include fruits and vegetables, whole grains and nuts on your list.
- Check your list before you grocery shop so that you have good choices available. Plan to keep some foods in your car and at work.
- Having foods cut up and ready to eat can help. Either buy them that way or prepare them in batches yourself. In summer I keep a bag of watermelon wedges in the refrigerator. I am much more likely to eat them this way than if I have to take out the whole melon to cut a slice.

Include your Favorite Foods

- It is important to be able to eat what you want. Nothing needs to be forbidden.
- Decide how frequently you want to eat your favorite high calorie foods. Give yourself permission to fully enjoy it and pay attention to how much it takes to be satisfied. It may be less than you think.
- One thing that helps is to concentrate on adding more fruits, vegetables and whole grains. These are powerhouses of nutrients and they are filling. Find healthy foods that you really enjoy.
- If you crave sweets, experiment with alternatives. Sweet herb teas can satisfy a sweet craving. So can fruit. Small amounts of dark chocolate can be satisfying and even healthy. It generally takes three days without sweets to stop craving sweets.
- You don't need to be perfect. If you eat well most of the time, then some of the time you can relax and just enjoy your old favorites. Some people use the 80/20 rule – eat well 80% of the time and don't worry about the remaining 20%. Find the balance that works for you.

Increase Awareness

- It really helps to be more aware. Slow down and really taste your food. Enjoy how satisfying it is. When you really pay attention, you'll usually find that you are fulfilled with less.
- Awareness practices like breathing, centering, and journaling can be helpful. Many of us eat to avoid feelings that are uncomfortable. The irony is that it usually makes us feel worse in the long run. Little by little you can get used to hanging out with those feelings.