

# Healthy Eating Throughout the Day

You stand a much better chance of getting in all your needed nutrients if you do have some sort of plan of eating vs. a hit-or-miss approach. Just how detailed this plan needs to be depends on your personality style, how much time you have to spare, your storage space and whether or not you are sharing your cooking and shopping with roommates.

Sometimes the easiest approach to meal planning is to think of dividing up your day into 3 meals and 2 or 3 snacks. This spreads out your food intake so that you have a steady energy level throughout your waking hours, supporting all your activities. Your brain depends on a fairly even blood sugar level to function well, which is another reason for spreading out your food intake throughout the day.

In general, your three meals should provide 75% of your energy needs. The remaining calories can be met by your snacks. Do not worry if you do not know the exact calorie content of the foods you eat. Just think about distributing foods fairly evenly at your meals, and at each meal have a good variety of foods (e.g., grains, proteins, vegetables, and dairy or dairy substitutes). This ensures a broad nutrient intake, since no one food, no matter how nutritious, can provide all the basics your body needs. Likewise, if you consistently leave out or limit one major food group, your diet will probably be out of balance and may lack some essential nutrients.

## CREATING A HEALTHY MEAL

Basic guidelines for most meal planning can begin with a meal that is approximately 50% fruits and vegetables, 25% proteins (e.g., meats, poultry, eggs, beans or tofu), and 25% grains. Aim for whole grains (e.g., brown rice vs. white rice, whole grain bread vs. white bread) as often as you can. Good complex carbohydrates (breads, cereals, rice, pastas, etc.) that are not whole grain will still give you excellent energy and plenty of nutrients. Their fiber and mineral content will be a bit lower than whole grains, and they may be missing some other nutrients lost in processing. In addition to the three main areas of your meal, adding a serving of low-fat milk (or calcium fortified milk substitute) or yogurt will help to round out the meal.

## VALUE OF EATING BREAKFAST

Eating early in the day gives your metabolism a head start. Studies have shown that rather than increasing your total food intake for the day, morning eating actually decreases binge eating later in the day. Data from 2002 show that rates of overweight are lower in those who include breakfast than in those who wait until later in the day to start eating.

Examples of easy-to-prepare breakfasts include:

- Yogurt and a small low-fat bran muffin
- Bagel with a slice of low-fat cheese and a fresh banana (cream "cheese" is mostly a fat and provides no protein, as opposed to a real cheese)
- Packet of microwaveable oatmeal with nuts and raisins or dried cranberries and low-fat milk instead of water
- Leftover slice of pizza with a glass of juice
- Peanut butter and banana slices in a pita
- High protein, low-fat, high fiber "meal bar" (The healthiest bars will contain from 7 to 12 grams of protein and no more than 3 grams of fat per 100 calories.)

If you have a little more time, you can be more inventive about how you approach breakfast. You can use leftovers from another University Health Service, University of Rochester – Call 275-2662 to schedule an appointment.

meal or combine ingredients in the refrigerator with old stand-by breakfast favorites. Remember to aim for at least 3 different types of food groups at each meal. This helps to ensure that you are getting a wide variety of nutrients throughout the day.

Here are some breakfast ideas that you can try if you have a little more time in the morning:

- Omelet with chopped vegetables and whole grain toast
- Fruit smoothie with fresh fruit and low-fat yogurt, sprinkled with low-fat granola or other cold cereal
- Grilled cheese sandwich, made with low-fat cheese and whole grain bread, with a glass of fruit juice
- Pancakes or freezer waffles, served with applesauce, cinnamon, and a glass of low-fat milk or fruit yogurt.

## LUNCH IDEAS

If three or more hours have passed since your first meal of the day, your blood sugar is dropping. Your energy levels and brain are probably signaling you that it is time to eat. Sometimes, feeling grumpy or lightheaded can be signals of hunger.

As with breakfast meals, leftovers can be a good resource to use for lunch meals. If you have a microwave, heating up leftovers that include protein and then adding a vegetable or fruit and some type of grain, will provide a basic meal. Rounding out lunch with low-fat milk or yogurt ensures another protein boost and is a great source of calcium that your body needs.

Here are just a few examples of lunches you can create quickly in your room or apartment kitchen. Some of these ideas will also work well for bag lunches.

- Canned soup that contains vegetables and some type of legume, such as chickpeas, black beans or lentils, along with bread and a green salad (can be prepared quickly from a purchased pre-bagged salad) with yogurt dressing
- Leftover stir-fry with vegetables, tofu, and brown rice, heated in the microwave, with a glass of low-fat milk
- Peanut butter and jam sandwich on wheat bread, baked black bean tortilla chips, and a fresh orange
- Pita with sliced lean turkey, cranberry sauce, and sprouts, with a dish of frozen low-fat yogurt and cookies
- Turkey breast on oat bran bread with green pepper rings and tomato slices, a piece of fresh fruit, peanut butter cookies, and low-fat yogurt
- Vegetarian chili, wheat crackers, baby carrots, and an apple
- Cheese and apple slices on a pita, fruit, yogurt, and cookies

Many foods, such as fruits, vegetables, grains, peanut butter, cooked legumes, and even yogurt will keep well for several hours without being refrigerated. If you bring meat, poultry, fish, egg or dairy in your packed lunch, use an insulated lunch bag with an ice pack. This is especially important if the temperatures are warm, and/or if you will be carrying this food longer than two hours.

## DINNER IDEAS

The evening meal is an ideal time to think about what your food intake has been during the rest of the day and fill in any nutrition gaps you might still have. By scanning your food intake from earlier in the day, you can easily increase or decrease portion sizes to meet daily needs. Refer to the Food Guide Pyramid to see what the recommendations are for your total daily food

## Healthy Eating Throughout the Day

intake. A snack or two in the evening will give you more opportunities to fill in nutrient and energy needs.

Pasta and tomato sauce is always a great fall-back for dinner, because there is so much you can do to vary that menu. For protein, try adding soy crumbles or beans to the sauce. Just add a salad, and you have a healthy meal.

Here are some other easy dinners you can assemble in a small apartment kitchen:

- Quick-cooking brown rice topped with stir-fry vegetable/chicken breast (or tofu/tempeh) mix, served with fruit and glass of low-fat milk
- 2 slices of vegetable pizza (extra on the veggies, easy on the cheese) with a side salad of mixed raw vegetables. Slice up a dark green or orange pepper for some concentrated vitamin C.
- Western Scramble: Two scrambled eggs, stirring in chopped vegetables that have been pre-cooked to soften (onions, green pepper, diced potato, broccoli pieces, etc.); served with English muffins with non-transfatty acid spread (e.g., Brummel & Brown, Heart Smart),
- Vegetarian chili, served with side salad and/or fruit, yogurt or low-fat milk. The beans in the chili provide protein, add healthful fiber to your diet, and help keep you feeling satisfied for a long time after you eat.

### CHOOSING SNACKS

Current recommendations support snacking as a way to boost your energy between meals and to furnish important nutrients that might be missing from your other meals during the day. Because many students find it hard to eat three regular meals a day, snacks become even more important as a way to fill in nutrition gaps created by an uncertain eating schedule. Moderate healthy snacks have been shown to decrease late-day binge eating.

If 4 or 5 hours pass after eating even a fairly good-sized meal, your stomach has emptied, and your blood sugar level has begun to drop. Not only will you begin to feel the sensations of hunger, other physical, emotional, and even mental changes could be starting to take place, signaling you to take in food. Ways your body sends out hunger messages to you could be nausea, dizziness, lightheadedness, headache, general sluggishness, feeling "spacey," the inability to concentrate, irritability, and decreased hand-eye coordination (especially important for athletes). Snacks that are eaten between meals can help to prevent these symptoms.

You may hear that snacking is "bad for you," that it will cause weight gain, or lead to out-of-control eating. Rather than categorizing snacking in these ways, think about choosing between-meal foods and drinks by what they can do for you. Some snacks, like chips, sodas, cookies, and ice cream, can add a lot of sugar, fat, and excess calories. Other types of snacks can supply needed vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

The American Dietetic Association provides some tips on choosing healthy snacks:

- *Plan ahead.* Pack fruit, trail mix (seeds, dried fruits, nuts), yogurt, and other portable foods ahead of time in your backpack. Then you will not have to rely on vending machines and convenience stores.

- *Snack consciously.* Mindless or emotional nibbling can lead to overeating. Try to eat a snack without doing anything else. Do not watch TV or study at the same time, especially if you are under stress.
- *Choose nutrient-rich foods.* Examples are whole grain muffins and crackers, baby carrots, popcorn, fresh fruit, yogurt, low-fat cheese, peanut butter, nuts, and seeds.
- *Be aware of hidden calories, fat, and sugar, especially if you are less active.* Reading labels can really help you here. In general, foods that have more than 3 gm fat/100 calories are considered a higher fat food. When you see the listing on a label for the amount of carbohydrates, grams of sugar will be listed under carbohydrate. If more than half of the carbohydrates are sugar, consider this a high sugar food item. Some cereal bars, sports drinks, and fruit drinks, for example, are extremely high in sugar.
- Look at the label for what is called a serving size for the item. You might consider an entire granola bar to be a serving, but on the label, one half of the bar might be called a serving. You would then need to double the calories, fat, protein, etc. to know what you are getting in a whole bar.

Here are some ideas for healthy, quick-to-prepare snacks to have on hand in your room or backpack:

- Instant or canned vegetable or bean soup
- Pretzels (whole grain for extra fiber and staying power)
- Snack-sized cereal boxes (same benefits if whole grain)
- Dried fruits
- Oatmeal packets (especially good with dried cranberries or raisins, and nuts)
- Low-fat crackers with peanut butter, almond butter, or low-fat cheese
- Low-fat yogurt with fruit pieces stirred in
- Air-popped popcorn. Try topping the popcorn with cinnamon, chili powder, low-fat cheese sprinkles. Use butter flavored spray to help these flavors stick to popcorn.
- Low-fat frozen yogurt with graham crackers, vanilla wafers, or ginger snaps
- Baked tortilla chips with low-fat melted cheese and salsa
- Raw fruits and vegetables, already cut up and in zip-loc bags. Try dipping them in a mixture of plain yogurt mixed with salsa or herbs
- Fruit smoothies (frozen or chilled fruit pieces blended with fruit juice and nonfat fruit yogurt)
- Remember that water is an essential nutrient. To quench your thirst, instead of soda, try juice spritzers (one part juice and one part sparkling water), vegetable juice, or flavored mineral waters.

### EATING HEALTHY WHEN EATING OUT

When eating out or on campus, aim for meals that are approximately 50% fruits and vegetables, 25% proteins (e.g., meats, poultry, eggs, beans, or tofu), and 25% grains.

It is important to be aware portion sizes in restaurants are typically much larger than what is considered a "serving size" on the Food Pyramid. The trend in the US is to eat more meals out. The large portion sizes are contributing to the rise in obesity. If you eat out frequently, here are some strategies you can try:

- Share an entrée with a friend.
- Order two appetizers for a meal, or soup and an appetizer.

# Healthy Eating Throughout the Day

- If you will be going home fairly soon, plan ahead to eat only ½ of your portion and ask the server to wrap the rest for your next meal. Do not save a dish with meat, poultry, or fish for longer than an hour or two at room temperature because of the danger of food poisoning.
- Go restaurants where you know portion sizes are more moderate.
- Avoid "super-sizing" at fast food places just to get a deal. You will be super-sizing fat, calories, and sugar.

## TIPS FROM "EATING ON THE RUN" BY EVELYN TRIBOLE

Ask for a menu modification (e.g., low fat milk instead of 2% milk). Most restaurants are more than willing to listen to special requests. Some suggestions for modifications include:

- Low-fat milk instead of cream for coffee
- Sauces and dressings on the side
- Whole grain breads
- An extra plate (to split an entrée or other dish)
- To have the skin of poultry removed
- To have meat or poultry prepared without extra fat or oil
- Substitution of fresh fruit, salad, or baked potato instead of French fries
- Vegetables or other foods prepared without added butter
- Asking for food to be divided into leftover container before being brought to the table
- Being able to return items to the kitchen if not prepared as requested or expected

Fast-food restaurants are more of a challenge when you are looking for healthier food choices. Here are some suggestions to help when eating in a fast-food restaurant:

- Stick with the char-broiled or roasted sandwiches, especially when ordering chicken.
- Check out the salads and salad bar. Go easy on the full-fat dressings.
- Quench your thirst with water, juice, or low-fat milk, instead of regular sodas. Diet sodas, coffee, and tea are sugar-free options, but contribute no nutrients.
- If you want something sweet, take advantage of the frozen yogurt offered in many fast-food places.
- If you choose pizza, remember plain or veggie pizza is a healthier choice than extra cheese, pepperoni, or cheese-crust types. Pizza can contribute a lot of good nutrients.
- For breakfast, skip the fried-type French toast items, and select from pancakes, cold cereal, plain toast, or plain bagels spread with jam or a thin layer of butter or margarine.

## HEALTHIER VS LESS HEALTHY CHOICES

From "Eating on the Run" by Evelyn Tribole

| Healthier Choice<br>(lower-fat) | Less Healthy Choice<br>(higher-fat) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Steamed                         | Fried                               |
| Broiled                         | Crispy                              |
| Mesquite-grilled                | Buttery, Butter sauce               |
| Stir-fried                      | Pan-fried                           |
| Barbecued                       | Alfredo                             |
| Marinara                        | Cream sauce                         |
| Roasted                         | Au gratin, cheese sauce             |
| Marinated in juice or wine      | Marinated in oil or butter          |
| Charbroiled                     | Sautéed                             |
| Boiled                          | Breaded                             |

It is important to remember that food is meant to be enjoyed. Balance and moderation are the best ways to approach healthy eating, instead of developing rigid rules about food. If you eat a generally healthy diet, then go ahead and savor a rich meal, some fast food, or gourmet ice cream.

## LINKS

Food and Nutrition Information Center  
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans  
<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/>

Recipes  
<http://www.allrecipes.com/>