

Don't Snack Between Meals



CHALLENGE

Don't snack between meals or before bedtime.

Requirements to Complete this WELLNESS CHALLENGE

1. On your monthly Wellness Challenge Calendar, record the number of days you don't snack between meals or before bedtime.
2. Read "What's a snack?" and "How to avoid snacking" below.
3. To complete the Challenge, you must be snack-free at least 22 days this month.
4. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

What's a snack?

A snack is anything eaten other than at mealtimes. It doesn't have to just food. Something you drink can be a snack food—and can lead to obesity and diabetes.

Researchers studied 548 school children for 2 school years, looking at various factors linked to the development of obesity. They found a strong link between intake of sugar sweetened drinks and development of obesity.

Included in the study were soft drinks (primary source of sugar drinks), fruit punch, Koolaid, lemonade, and sweetened iced tea, but not 100% fruit juices. A 12-ounce can of soda contains 10 to 13 teaspoons of sugar and about 150 calories.

In the study, children who drank sugar-sweetened drinks consumed about 200 extra calories daily compared to children who didn't drink sugar-sweetened drinks. For every additional can or glass of sugar-sweetened drink consumed, the risk for obesity increased by 60% even after adjusting for other dietary habits and level of physical activity.

In the last 50 years, the intake of soft drinks has increased by over 500% and appears to be a major cause of obesity in children (and adults as well). Calories that come from a drink are added so easily and quickly, the body just doesn't seem to monitor them properly.

How to avoid snacking

One of the best ways to avoid snacking is to fill up on highly nutritious unrefined, high fiber foods, balanced with healthy fats and protein foods at regular meal times. Foods that convert to glucose (blood sugar) more slowly keep you satisfied longer.

Another strategy for overcoming your snack habit is to keep a log for a few days to help you identify when you snack, what foods you snack on, and any emotion or situation that triggers snacking. Do you snack late at night, while stuck in traffic jams, or when you hang out with snacking friends? Are you tired, stressed, or feeling lonely? Do you find a particular candy or snack food irresistible?

Use the following log to keep track of your snacking habits.

TIME	PLACE (work, bed, car, friend's house, shopping mall, kitchen)	FOOD (chips, milkshake, soda pop, apple, coffee drink, cookie, carrot stick)	CALORIES	CIRCUMSTANCE (angry, habit, tired, lonely, bored, stressed, frustrated, social eating, mindless)
8 AM	bus	peanut M&Ms®, 1 pkg	250	hungry-skipped breakfast
10 AM hour	easy chair, living room	1 whole bag microwave popcorn	430	reading

"Because it's there"

Keeping a supply of snack foods in the kitchen pantry, your desk drawer, or the glove box of your car makes snacking easy. Consider cleaning out your stash of unhealthy snack foods. If you can't stand the idea of throwing them away, perhaps you can donate unopened packages to the local food bank or give them to neighbors.

Another strategy is to immediately clear the table and put away leftovers. If you find yourself raiding the refrigerator for a midnight snack of leftovers, cook less food to eliminate leftovers.

Mindless eating

Have you ever noticed that you eat more when eating in front of the TV or computer screen? Now we have research that documents this phenomenon. Researchers fed a group of 41 women a meal under 4 different conditions and then watched to see if their surroundings affected how much they ate:

- Eating alone in silence
- Eating alone listening to a recording about the meals taste and texture
- Eating alone listening to a recorded detective story
- Eating together in groups of 4

When the women ate alone listening to the detective drama they ate 300 calories more than during the other 3 settings. If you always eat in front of the TV, your mind becomes conditioned so that anytime you watch TV you think you need to eat. Interestingly, eating in a group did not increase food intake.

If you are having a hard time keeping your weight under control, you may want to avoid eating alone in front of the TV and try to make mealtime more social. Eating with the family or friends can provide quality contact time that provides additional health benefits.

Boredom binging

Sometimes people eat because they're bored. "There's nothing to do—what's there to eat?" Keeping your body and mind active is a great anti-snacking strategy.

Instead of snacking:

- Walk around the block
- Drink a glass of water
- Call a friend
- Put a puzzle together
- Pet the dog
- Bathe the cat
- Scrub your toilet
- Garden
- Paint your fingernails
- Play an instrument
- Lift weights
- Knit or crochet
- Scrapbook
- Brush your teeth

Bedtime snacking habit

Many people were raised with a bedtime snack—a little something to tide them over until morning. But that habit contributes to weight gain and acid reflux (heartburn). Abstaining from food after 8 pm eliminates extra calories, and also forces your body to burn fat.

If you're absolutely "starving," eat half a serving of fresh fruit such as half an apple or a small orange. Otherwise, enjoy the benefits of sleeping on an empty stomach.

Snacking may be healthy for some

Eating 3 meals a day might not be enough for some people such as people who have blood sugar problems or are especially thin. Active children and teens—who are burning a lot of energy just because they're growing—might also need to eat more frequently.

Small, healthy meals—spaced 3 or 4 hours apart—can give a more steady supply of calories and can keep energy and blood sugar at more consistent levels. Just be sure the foods you snack on are unrefined, high fiber, healthy fats, or high in protein and do not exceed 200 to 250 calories.

- Low fat cheese
- Peanut butter and low sugar jelly sandwich
- Fruit and cottage cheese
- Fresh fruit
- Raw vegetables
- Power bar
- Fortified, high-fiber cereal and low fat milk or soymilk
- A handful of nuts or sunflower seeds stirred into low fat yogurt

Check with your health care provider to see if snacking is a healthy choice for you. In this case, you're not really snacking. You're eating 4 to 6 smaller meals daily, but not consuming more calories.

References:

1. *New England Journal of Medicine*, Health News, Oct. 2001
1. Ludwig DS et al, *Relation between consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks and childhood obesity*, *The Lancet* Feb 17, 2001; 367:505-08
2. Ebbeling CB et al, *Childhood Obesity: public-health crisis, common sense cure*, *The Lancet* Aug 10, 2002, 360:473-82



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Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record each day you don't snack between meals or before bedtime.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you were snack-free. You must meet this goal at least 22 days during the month to complete the Challenge. Then keep up this healthy practice for a lifetime of good health.
4. Enter your completion of the Wellness Challenge on your Health Activity Tracker report for the month. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

MONTH:

WC = Wellness Challenge ex. min. = exercise minutes

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
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_____ Number of days this month I didn't snack or eat before bedtime.

_____ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking

Other wellness projects completed this month:

Signature _____ Date _____

