

HEALTH ADVISORY

Dietary Pitfalls / Health & Fitness Performance

Balanced Protein

Most people eat all their protein in one meal. They might order large steak or extra meat for dinner. But the human body functions best with a constant supply of protein that is evenly distributed among meals and snacks. Consuming all your protein in one sitting means you're probably getting a moderate to high amount of fat and calories at one time as well. Extra fat or protein without any demands is one reason people gain weight. And, because big meals usually occur in the evening, your body works all night trying to metabolize the meal and you get up in the morning feeling sluggish and finding it's tough to kick your metabolism into high gear.

Spread Out the Fat

If you are trying to lose weight, boost your health and improve your health and fitness, then be concerned about your fat intake and when it occurs. As with protein, most people with poor nutritional habits take in a large amount of fat all in one meal. It's not that fat by itself is bad for you, but too much fat (an intake higher than 30% of total dietary calories) at the wrong time (all at once) and the wrong kind (animal fat) can lead to obesity and a myriad of problems, including heart disease, liver disease and certain cancers.

Drink Before You Become Thirsty

Thirst always lags behind need, so using thirst as a water-regulation device means you'll be shortchanging your body's water needs. With a busy lifestyle, it's often easy to ignore the thirst signals that your body produces. The result is that people don't drink enough water. A good rule of thumb is to drink 12 ounces of water every two to three hours.

Don't Skip Breakfast

Skip breakfast and you will probably eat a heavy dinner. And when breakfast is eaten, often inappropriate and incomplete foods, such as a bagel (all carbohydrates, very little protein or fat) and a large cup of coffee (giving a boost from caffeine, not nutrients) are chosen. This pattern causes both weight gain and low energy levels. Some of the nutritional shake products on the market can be excellent choices for breakfast because they pack a nutritional punch and add water to your diet.

The Value of TEF

Some of the energy you expend comes from simply digesting your food. Called the thermogenic effect of food (TEF), this process generally accounts for approximately 10% of the total calories you take in at any given meal. However, if you eat smaller meals throughout the day, this rate goes up slightly. So, if you are trying to lose weight for health and fitness, eat four or five smaller meals to burn more calories.

Don't Eat Past 8:00pm

This can be a problem for people with lifestyles that include evening business dinners and social occasions because the next morning you will tend to skip or eat a nutritionally inadequate breakfast. Your goal should be to have dinner started no later than 6:00pm. If you do eat later, eat lightly. Make sure you have breakfast before 9:00am and lunch no later than 1:00pm.

Don't Use Food to Replace Body Water

Because most people don't drink enough water, they rely too heavily on food to replace water in their bodies. One easy trick to boost your water intake is to drink a full glass of water before each meal – it will get you closer to the necessary water intake levels and help keep you from overeating.

Avoid the Accelerating Meal Profile

Sometimes it's not the total calories you eat, but when they are consumed. For many people, breakfast is toast with coffee, if at all. Lunch is a light salad or sandwich and then dinner is the majority of calories. In this scenario, your metabolism actually slows down in the morning and through lunch as the body responds to the lack of fuel. When you do finally eat dinner, it is generally so large that the body can't use all the calories taken in, so they go back into storage replacing any weight lost from the reduced calories at breakfast and lunch.

The Ideal Health and Fitness Diet

Although three squares a day is a good start toward optimum nutrition, three smaller meals together with well-balanced snacks or supplements is even better. Remember that the thermogenic effect of food (TEF) is enhanced if you eat five to six smaller meals, which will help you to lose weight. Just think of the extra energy your body must expend just to digest those additional smaller meals or snacks. It's a fallacy that skipping meals or eating one large meal each day aids in weight loss.

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