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Eat more, lose more?

Too much time between meals raises risk of overeating

DES MOINES, IA (October 19, 2009) – Many dieters try to cut calories by skipping breakfast. Or eating a healthy breakfast and then skipping lunch. Or cutting out snacks during the day.

Sounds like a logical way to lose weight, right?

Not so, according to Julie Enga, RD, LD, a Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield nutrition consultant. Enga says that eating smaller, balanced meals – and smarter snacks – is a more effective weight loss strategy than skipping meals.

“Spreading your daily allotment of calories over five or six meals and snacks allows you to eat more frequently and feel more satisfied, but not eat too much,” she said. Eating more frequent, smaller meals at regular intervals can also help stabilize blood sugar levels, which in turn can increase energy and concentration.

Hunger catches up to us

A 2008 USDA Economic Research Service report, for example, found that the longer study participants waited between meals, the more calories they were likely to consume. Subjects ate 52 extra calories after waiting five hours between meals, and 91 extra calories after waiting six hours. Even more dangerous: those extra calories typically come from high-fat or high-sugar foods.

“Skipping breakfast, then reaching for the bag of potato chips when you walk in the door at night won’t help you meet your goals,” Enga said.

Food choice also plays a significant role. The secret, Enga says, is choosing low-calorie foods that are rich in nutrients, including lean proteins, whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

And don’t forget the drinks

One 20-ounce bottle of Coca-Cola®, for example, contains nearly 250 calories. That's one eighth, or 12 percent, of your daily allotment (based on a 2,000 calorie/day diet).* A 20-ounce bottle of Diet Coke has only *two* calories.

For coffee drinkers, a Starbucks® “grande”-sized Caffé Latte has 220 calories using whole milk, but only 130 calories using skim milk.* (By the way, that White Chocolate Mocha, with whole milk and whipped cream, has *500* calories.)

“If you’re drinking a latte every day, then choose the smaller size and make it ‘skinny’ by using skim milk,” Enga said. “Then, add an apple on the side, and count it as one snack.”

In the end, Enga notes, it’s all about listening to your body. “We have to ask ourselves if we’re eating out of hunger, or out of habit. Eating when your body tells you it’s hungry, and stopping when you’re satisfied, is the foundation of successful weight loss.”

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