

Changing Eating Frequency to Assist Weight Loss

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One of the common mistakes people fall into when trying to achieve their ideal body weight is to begin to skip meals or reduce the amount of meals per day. Whilst in theory this may reduce the opportunities per day to absorb energy, in reality it usually has a negative impact on motivation, ability to maintain the change to eating patterns as well as a person's metabolism (rate of energy consumption)

Why eat more frequently?

The benefits of increasing frequency mainly revolve around a thermic effect (the amount of energy required to digest and absorb food), maintenance of blood sugar levels and satiety (feeling of fullness).

In theory if you split your meals up into smaller portions and eat more frequently throughout the day you could potentially burn a little more energy through the thermic effect of food. This may help but we also need to be mindful of the negative impact, of potentially teaching habitual eating which can lead to over-consumption of food and more importantly higher total energy consumption (energy input).

Maintaining the body's blood sugar levels could remain more consistent, reducing the need for insulin, which promotes the growth of fat tissue and weight gain. This remains controversial as blood sugar levels are influenced by both the frequency of eating as well as the nature of the food consumed.

Most importantly if a person eats regularly the highs and lows in hunger (biological desires or need to eat) are much less so that when a person does eat they are topping up resulting in feelings of fullness being recognised sooner. This is more desirable when trying to achieve an ideal body weight vs long periods between meals because if you're really hungry there is a greater risk of consuming excess amounts of energy before you realise you're full. (Ever been shopping when you're really hungry?)

What is important to consider when discussing eating frequency is that you should never intentionally skip a main meal, nor should you fast for a long period of time as this will more often than not lead to over consumption at the next meal.

Eating Frequency Recommendations:

Our recommendations regarding eating frequency to assist weight loss are relatively simple. Eat 3 main healthy meals a day to ensure adequate nutrition and to help satisfy your hunger. Additionally eat something (not necessarily a meal, but preferably healthy and low energy density) at least every 4 hours. This will help to maintain blood sugar levels and consequently improve energy levels and concentration. Additionally eating every 4 hours will help to ensure that you don't over indulge at the next meal.

An important note to consider regarding eating frequency is that the above discussion is tailored towards the goal of weight loss. If you have a specific medical condition such as diabetes (type 1 or type 2), it is best to speak a qualified dietician regarding your diet plan including the types of food you should be eating as well as the eating frequency.

For more information on energy density and portion sizes check out the patient downloads in the Diet & Nutrition section of www.lifestylemedicine.net.au OR email: info@lifestylemedicine.net.au