

[IMAGE]

Don't Wait to Lose Weight

A Healthy Meal Plan for a Healthy Weight and Lifestyle

By Donald L. Hayes, DC

You've started working out consistently: step one in your quest to lose those extra pounds and achieve a healthier weight. But wait a minute - are you forgetting about sound nutrition? When it comes to weight loss, what you eat (and when you eat it) can make all the difference. Here's a healthy meal plan to make things easy.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to make the right choices when it comes to meal planning. Junk food and hectic lifestyles are expanding waistlines and deteriorating health at an alarming rate. More than two-thirds of adult Americans are either overweight or obese, and obesity-related health problems are reaching epidemic proportions.

Lose Weight 1 - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Your health is your most prized possession, so it's important to learn how to make healthy food choices for life. Most people understand that the body has a built-in ability to maintain health and heal itself as long as it is provided proper nutrition. Most people also understand that being overweight contributes to health challenges and sickness. Therefore, the healthiest meal planning approach to consider is one that uses healthy whole-food meals and snacks in tandem with a simple and easy calorie-controlled meal replacement strategy. Daily meal planning that incorporates both of these concepts will end up supporting healthy weight management and overall health.

Controlling hunger is one of the most difficult issues facing people today, particularly people trying to lose weight. A healthy meal plan must offer a satisfying way to control hunger for hours at a time, helping to reduce the temptation to overeat between meals. What's more, all foods eaten on the meal plan should provide a good source of all three macronutrients - protein, complex carbohydrates (in this scenario, primarily vegetables) and healthy oils - in a balanced format that provides the recommended daily intake for most essential vitamins and minerals.

Think Six for Success

Even with people who are trying to lose weight, the ideal healthy meal plan involves eating six meals a day so you're never hungry. These six meals should be broken down into two whole-food "regular" meals, two whole-food snacks and two high-energy, nutrient-dense, low-calorie meal replacement shakes. Daily scheduling of these meals could be as follows:

- **Breakfast:** meal replacement shake
- **Mid-morning snack:** whole-food healthy snack
- **Lunch:** whole-food regular meal
- **Afternoon snack:** meal replacement shake
- **Dinner:** whole-food regular meal
- **Evening snack:** whole-food healthy snack

Your Regular Meals

Your whole-food regular meals should consist of lean protein (meat or vegetarian) plus salad and/or vegetables. You can enjoy whole-food regular meals any time during the day; however, most people find it best to eat them for lunch and dinner. You can prepare them yourself, grab them on the go, or enjoy them in a restaurant, as long as you follow the following general guidelines in terms of content:

Protein: Choose any of the following and prepare it grilled, baked, or poached (not fried):

- 5-7 ounces of cooked, lean meat, such as chicken, turkey, fish, beef, pork, lamb or shellfish.
- Meatless options include eggs and garden burgers. You don't have to be a vegetarian to enjoy meatless meals.

Complex Carbohydrates: Select any *three* servings from the vegetable list below:

- Celery (1/2 cup)
- Cucumber (1/2 cup)
- Lettuce, butter (1 cup)
- Lettuce, iceberg (1 cup)
- Mushroom, white (1/2 cup)
- Mushroom, portabello (1/2 cup)

- Radishes (1/2 cup)
- Romaine lettuce (1 cup)
- Spinach, fresh/raw (1 cup)
- Spring mix (1 cup)
- Alfalfa sprouts (1/2 cup)
- Asparagus (1/2 cup)
- Cabbage (1/2 cup)
- Cauliflower (1/2 cup)
- Spinach, cooked (1/2 cup)
- Broccoli (1/2 cup)
- Cabbage, red (1/2 cup)
- Green or wax beans (1/2 cup)
- Peppers: green, red, yellow (1/2 cup)
- Tomato, red ripe (1/2 cup)

Your Snacks

Your healthy snacks could consist of a small portion of lean protein (1-2 ounces) or a small portion of vegetables, such as celery, cucumber, radishes or peppers (green, red, yellow, etc.). You can also choose from a variety of fruits for your snack, but remember, fruits have more sugar content than vegetables, which may increase your hunger. Always choose whole fruits; avoid sugar-sweetened fruit cups, juices, etc., and do not substitute fruit juice, which doesn't have the fiber and complete nutrient content of a whole fruit. Enjoy your healthy snack at a mid-morning break or in the evening.

By the way, you may have noticed that this healthy meal planner doesn't rely on whole grains or similar carbohydrates. Including the typical USDA recommendation of 6-8 ounce equivalents of grains daily (1 bagel = 4 ounce equivalents) as snacks or as part of your regular meals is acceptable, but only as long as you're participating in moderate physical activity. Otherwise, you may find you don't lose weight as easily as you would eating lean protein and vegetable-based carbohydrates. Whole grains are highly preferable to refined grains.

Your Nutrient-Rich Shakes

Lose Weight 2 - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Enjoy your high-energy, low-carb meal replacement shakes any time during the day or whenever you get hungry. Most people use them at breakfast, as an afternoon snack, or in the evening. Make sure you select a natural whole-food vegetarian meal replacement shake that contains a quality vegetarian protein source, a vegetarian form of essential fatty acids for the healthy oils and an enzyme active greens blend that will provide complex fruit and vegetable carbohydrates.

A high-quality meal replacement shake should not contain sugar or a synthetic sweetener, yet it should taste delicious when mixed in just cold water. Quality products typically use sweeteners that do not trigger insulin. Be sure to check with your doctor before selecting any meal replacement product.

Tips For Success

- **Don't skip meals:** Make sure you eat all six meals each day to keep your body well-nourished and your metabolic rate high.
- **Eat every two to three hours:** Eating on a regular basis will keep you feeling full and help you lose weight / maintain a healthy weight.
- **Eat slowly:** Spend at least 15 minutes eating each whole-food meal; eat snacks and drink your meal replacement shake as slowly as possible.
- **Drink lots of water:** Drink at least eight cups (64 ounces) of water each day.

A healthy body starts with a healthy weight. When you incorporate a healthy meal plan into your daily routine, you're taking an important step toward long-term health and wellness while losing those extra pounds your body doesn't need and you certainly don't want. With each pound you lose, your confidence will grow. Good luck! Talk to your doctor for more information.

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