

LIFESTYLES WITH SYLVIA



Dear Friends,

Welcome back! I hope you had a very happy Memorial Day weekend. Now that the holiday parties and celebrations are over though, it's time to get back on track. This month's column will cover smaller serving pieces, how to eat, and useful tips on food shopping and reading food labels. Let's get started...

Think Small

We are all being served bigger helpings, and everyone around us seems to be eating larger amounts. So how does a mindful eater avoid following the crowd and downing three or four portions at a time? Here are some tried-and-true techniques from successful weight "losers":

Use smaller serving pieces. Watching your calorie intake doesn't mean you can't fill your plate—you just need to start using a smaller plate! A 7-inch plate, about the size of a salad plate or child-size plate, is ideal for your main meal. Along the same lines, choose a 1-cup dessert or cereal bowl instead of a soup bowl and a 6-ounce wine glass rather than a goblet.

Train your eye. Eating the right portion sizes requires knowing how big they're supposed to be. In your own kitchen, try measuring out an accurate portion of the foods you eat regularly—say, cereal, soup or pasta—into one type of bowl, so you'll imprint a visual memory of how they look in the bowl, and then use that bowl every time you eat that food.

Ask for an extra salad plate. These days, restaurants will give you much more food than you need, so get a smaller side plate or hold on to your bread plate (if it's large enough) and transfer the appropriate portion-size of your food onto it when your entrée is served. And don't worry, nothing will go to waste as long as you ask your waiter to wrap up the rest of your meal. Another option is to ask that the kitchen serve you only ½ of your entrée and wrap the remainder for you to take home, or you can even try ordering a ½ portion of the entrée of your choice.

Buy single-serving packages. Single-serving packages of tempting foods make it easy to know when to stop. Can't find single-serving packages for your favorite treat? Simply divide a larger package into single portions and put them into individual small plastic bags.

Read labels. Everything you need to know about your food is right there on the label (read on for more information). Plus, you can easily make sure you are eating only a single portion of packaged foods.

Cook up calorie-rich foods in pre-portioned sizes. Just like buying single-serving packages, control your portions by dividing casseroles into ramekins, baking mini cupcakes rather than cakes and making meatloaf in muffin cups.

In the end, all of these tips allow you to deny yourself nothing while still being mindful of how much you are eating so you don't overeat. It's that simple.

Food Shopping

Every time you step into the grocery store you should have the same goal: to stock up on healthy foods and only buy what you truly need. That said, the supermarket can be a pretty tempting place, so here are a few tips to keep you on course:

Have a plan. Spend 15 minutes at the beginning of each week planning out healthy meals for the next seven days. Then make a list of the ingredients you will need to make those meals and you're ready to start filling your cart.

Never shop without a list in hand. If you're shopping for what you need and not necessarily just what you want, you will be less likely to "impulse buy."

Never shop hungry. Hunger makes it much easier to give in to temptation, so go shopping after you have had a meal. Believe it or not, you'll end up buying fewer groceries.

Shop the periphery. All grocery store aisles are not created equal. Generally, you will find whole foods (fresh produce, dairy, etc.) along the sides and back of the store while packaged foods, including tempting snacks, are usually concentrated in the center aisles.

A Closer Look at the Label

By law, packaged foods sold in the U.S. must have a standardized Nutritional Facts Panel, so why not put them to good use? Always take the time to compare labels to find a brand you like with a nutritional profile that works with your health goals. To get started, focus on these key areas:

Serving size: "One serving" might not be what you consume in one sitting, so always check and adjust accordingly.

Calories: The calories listed only reflect a count for a single serving, so you will need to adjust if you eat more or less.

Key Nutrients: Nutrient labels list the amounts present of the nutrients that supply energy (also known as calories)—carbohydrates, protein and fats.

Additional categories worth noting are:

Saturated Fat: Should be as low as possible (under 3 grams/serving).

Trans Fat: Should be "0."

Cholesterol: Should be as low as possible (daily goal is 300 mg or less).

Sodium: Should be as low as possible (Dietary Guidelines recommendation is 2,300 mg per day or less).

Dietary Fiber: Should be as high as possible (daily goal is 25 grams or more).

Sugars: While these numbers can be interesting, they're not always useful since labels don't discriminate between naturally occurring sugars and added sugars.

Vitamins and minerals: Vitamins A and C, calcium and iron are required to be listed on labels, since consuming enough of these nutrients can improve your health and reduce your risk of some diseases (they are shown in the form of Daily Values).

Percentage of Daily Values (DVs): These are reference amounts set by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

How to Eat

In addition to changing *what* you eat, changing *how* you eat can also help you cut calories. Here are some simple adjustments you can make to help you achieve your health goals:

Designate one eating place. Choose one location to have your meals, either the kitchen or the dining room table. It should be comfortable, but not filled with distractions like television, reading material or computer screens. When you are fully focused on your meal, you will be less likely to overeat.

Don't come to the table starving. When you're hungry, you eat; when you're very hungry, you eat too much. With that in mind, try not to have more than five hours lapse between meals, and never skip a meal.

Eat only on plates and bowls. Eating straight from the bag or the box makes it hard to know when you've had your fill. Eating from plates and bowls reinforces the fact that you are eating a meal, and that it has a beginning and an end.

Don't take serving bowls to the table. Along the same lines as only eating from plates and bowls, keep the serving bowls of food on the kitchen counter and just carry your plate to the table. As a result, you'll be less likely to double or triple dip without even realizing it.

Fill up on fiber first. Loading up on high fiber foods such as vegetables helps you feel full and can prevent you from overdoing on higher-calorie food later.

Slow down. It takes about twenty minutes for the "I'm full" signals to reach your brain, and if you're eating quickly you can pack in a lot of unnecessary calories in that time. To ease your pace, try putting down your fork or spoon between each bite, eating with smaller utensils and chatting with your dining companions. If you're alone, take some relaxing breaths.

Listen to your body. Think of your hunger as a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "starving" and 5 being "stuffed." Stop when you have reached 3 or 4 on the scale—the point when you feel comfortably satisfied, but could still eat a little more.

Well that wraps it up for the June column. Hopefully this information helps you to get a little closer to your goal. Remember, the main point is to not only to remain mindful of which foods you eat, but also the amounts you eat, where you eat it and how you buy it. Next month we will take a look at making the right moves, since moving more is the secret weapon for weight loss.

Until next time, happy healthful eating,

Sylvia

June 2009