

The Power of a Food Diary

Food journaling is a great discovery tool. It is also a good strategy for weight loss. Writing down what you eat and drink in a simple notebook or recording it on a spreadsheet can help you examine your eating habits and make necessary changes to your diet and your eating behaviors.

Here Is How You Do It:

Record what you eat and drink in a notebook, spreadsheet, spare check register, or binder. Make sure to write it **ALL** down, including nibbles, licks and samples. The more information you gather and record, the more information you will have to examine your food habits and behaviors.

Be clear about your goals and write them down. Are you interested in weight loss, improved nutrition, getting more fiber, less sodium, or a more heart-healthy diet? Writing down your goals tells you where you are going and is the first step to success. Make sure goals are measurable and attainable. Think about it carefully and write them in bold print on the first page.

Set a benchmark. Record your beginning weight and body measurements (neck, chest, upper arms, waist, hips, upper thighs, and calves). If you know the numbers, record your body mass index, cholesterol count, triglyceride count, etc. Part of the process in making the change is evaluating where you are.

- Record each food and how much you ate on a separate line.
- Record time of day you ate a meal or snack.
- Record where you ate. Home, in the car, restaurant, etc.
- List glasses of water and other beverages.
- Write how you were feeling during the meal (hungry, bored, tired, anxious, upset).
- If you want to follow the food pyramid suggestions for servings per day (www.mypyramid.gov/), make a chart to cross off servings from food groups as you eat them each day. You may also want to consider counting calories, fats grams, sodium, etc.

Here's Why It Works:

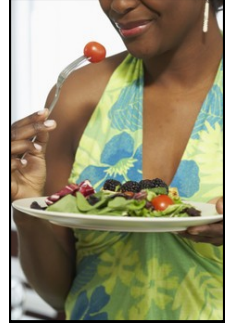
- Journaling boosts your self-control and increases your accountability. No one wants to write down that they binged on 10 cookies. Because you are recording quantities, you are likely to make a better choice to eat 2 cookies instead.
- Keeping a diary will help you evaluate calorie intake. Writing down sweets will help you see where those extra calories are coming from. Writing everything down shows the "cost" of those occasional nibbles.
- Food journaling shows your progress. When you record a goal and a starting point, a journal will help you see that your efforts are worthwhile. See yourself changing. Reading your food journal over time can show you how important the changes that you make are helping you reach your goals. If you are backsliding, go back and look at your successes—read where you've done it before and know that you can do it again.



The Power of a Food Diary, cont.

Here's Why It Works, cont.:

- Examining your journal helps you associate the foods you eat with the way you feel. For example, perhaps you binge-eat late at night because you can't sleep. Writing it down helps you see your eating patterns. Identify a pattern, and make a healthy change.
- A journal helps you identify your nutrition intake. Maybe you are getting too much sodium or caffeine, or not enough green leafy vegetables, or maybe your diet needs more fluids. A journal can be a great way to evaluate your choices and make changes when needed.
- Keeping track of your food intake lets you know when you can treat yourself. You can plan to indulge yourself guilt-free if you know that you haven't had a treat all week.



For more information about food journaling, visit the following websites:

<http://www.mypyramid.gov/>
<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/PublicationsDietaryGuidelines/2005/2005DGConsumerBrochure.pdf>