



Meal **BALANCING** Act

a not so new approach to weight loss

By Joanna K. Chodorowska, BA, NC

It seems like we are perpetually on a diet, on the run and out of energy. We are trying to keep up with the ten thousand things we need to do for work, family and of course, for yourself. With that kind of fast paced life, who has time to think about healthy eating? There is a simple thing one can do to help keep the energy levels up while also burning off calories without all the hours at the gym. Instead of stressing or having TV time, you will have planning time. Time to plan your meals and make sure you are getting what you need for when you need it. Here are a few things you may want to consider when starting a healthier eating plan that will also allow for weight loss and better health.

When starting a diet program to lose weight, we seem to all want to do the same thing- stop eating. We skip meals to save on calories we consume. Calories in have to be less than calories expended. To lose one pound per week, we try to shave off 500 pounds per day of calories (3500 calories = 1 pound) typically by skipping meals. With this approach we are actually making weight loss harder. We are allowing the body to go into starvation mode where it will store more of the calories you take in so you do not run out of energy or wither away to nothing. Skipping meals will also slow down the metabolism in an effort to again conserve your energy. By skipping meals, you effectively make your body more efficient at fewer calories.

There is another mechanism that comes into play when we skip meals or have a balanced meal plan. When you skip meals (breakfast included!) your blood sugar levels drop. This is commonly known as hypoglycemia or low blood sugar. When your blood sugar is low, your body will start conserving energy. You will get cranky, irritable, tired and craving caffeine. Most likely

you will get a headache and crave sweets, breads, cookies and other simple sugar items. This is all in an effort to get that blood sugar up and receive a quick energy boost.

Poor will power actually has nothing to do with your body's reaction. In response to low blood sugar, you consume simple sugars and refined flour products. These quickly get into the blood stream. The downside is that the simple sugars from these refined flour products and sweets spike the blood sugar too much. You then are on a "sugar high" (hyperglycemia or high blood sugar) which lasts about ninety minutes and then the blood sugar drops again. This process initiates a cycle of spike-drop while the insulin tries to keep up with the fluctuations. With those fluctuations comes a spike and drop in your energy levels. Those moody co-workers or relatives of yours may just be experiencing one of these cycles of low blood sugar. Who knew?

One way to counteract the blood sugar drop is to balance your meals and snacks along with their timing throughout the day. Sound simple? It actually is once you get the hang of it. You basically need to eat about 300-400 calories every 3-4 hours to keep a balance between the protein, carbohydrates and fats in each meal. This balance varies a bit among people but generally you want 15-20% protein, 50-60% carbohydrates and 10-15% fat. Yes, I did write 50-60% carbohydrates. Remember fruits and vegetables are carbohydrates. You need those in addition to your grains and potatoes. Vegetables and fruits should be 2/3 of the total carbohydrate number. Just as the new Food Pyramid suggests, eat more fruits and vegetables.

HERE IS AN IDEA AS TO WHAT THIS TYPE OF MEAL OR SNACK LOOKS LIKE:

7 AM: BREAKFAST: 2-3 eggs with one slice of whole grain bread, pat of butter and a piece of fruit (not juice).

10 AM: SNACK: 2 ounces low fat cheese with 6 whole grain crackers, ½ cup grapes

1 PM: Lunch: 2-3 ounces turkey sliced on whole grain bread with ¼ cup lettuce + tomato + tspn mayo (or hummus), side salad (1 cup) with tspn vinaigrette dressing.

4 PM: Snack: plain yogurt (6 oz) with ¼ cup granola, 1 tbsp whey protein, ½ cup fresh fruit.

7 PM: Dinner: 2-3 oz grilled salmon, 1 ½ cups green beans steamed, tspn vinaigrette dressing, ½ cup brown or wild rice, ½ cup fruit.

Once you adopt this kind of eating on a regular basis, you will retrain your body to burn fat not store it. You will have more energy throughout the day and be more productive at work and at home. Additionally, you will find that the cravings for sweets will disappear as well as that endless afternoon and evening snacking.

One other thing to consider is to plan the meals. You may actually have to spend 20-30 minutes before bed or first thing in the morning getting the meals together for the day. Take the cooler with you with your prepared meals and snacks. This will also avoid that sudden question: "I am so hungry. What should I eat?" If you take the meals with you, the guesswork is gone. You also get the benefit of knowing what it is you are actually eating. If after a few weeks, you are still struggling with putting meal plans together and taking the snacks, it may be a good time to consult with a nutritionist or registered dietician. They can help you put healthy options together along with recipes and ideas of what to take with you or buy when you are on the run without a packed snack.

It is all about moderation and variety. Enjoy eating smaller portions more frequently, balance the meals (along with your regular exercise) and enjoy a healthier, lighter you, one meal at a time.



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