

Keeping a Meal Diary

Keeping a meal diary is one of the best ways to keep yourself on track or to get back on track. An accurate meal diary allows you to look at the types and amounts of food and beverages you are consuming. It's easy to eat or drink something and forget it passed your lips! Here are tips for using our meal diary:

Location: Write down where the food and drinks are consumed: at home, in the car, at work, at a restaurant, at a friend's house, at a movie or sporting event, etc.

Time: Write down what time of the day food and drinks are consumed. **Write down your food and beverages as soon as you consume them.** It's easy to forget by the end of the day what you ate or drank throughout the day.

Amount: Liquids are usually recorded in fluid ounces, cups, or tablespoons. For solid foods, you can record the weight (grams or ounces), volume (cups or tablespoons), or standard servings (slice of bread, small apple, etc.) Remember to use standard measuring cups and spoons. It's a good idea to use a small food scale. The approximate size of a piece of food can also be useful. For example, when estimating meat portions, a 3-ounce serving is about the size of a deck of cards. You can use our "Estimating Portion Sizes" to help you out.

Food: It is important that you record information of foods and drinks consumed. Use the following guidelines to help you record food and beverages. You can be as detailed as you like. Keep in mind the more information you include about the food, the more awareness you will have about your food choices.

Beverages- usually recorded in fluid ounces, cups, or tablespoons

Protein shakes- made with milk or water, fruit added

Coffee/tea- caffeinated or decaffeinated, flavored. Don't forget creamers and sweeteners!

Cocoa- sugar-free, fat free, made with milk or water

Zero calorie or low calorie beverages can be tracked by checking off the squares in the Zero Calorie Beverage Box.

Breads and bread products-usually recorded in weight, slice, or piece

Whole wheat, rye, cracked wheat, multigrain, raisin, etc.

Don't forget added toppings such as butter or margarine, cream cheese, jellies, jams, preserves!

Cereals- usually recorded in cups

Hot cereal-type, cooked in water or milk, added fat or sweetener

Cold cereal- type, sweetener added, type of milk added

Grain products- usually recorded in cups

Pasta- whole wheat or white, prepared mix or plain, sauces or fat added

Rice- brown or white, prepared mix or plain product, sauces or fat added

Waffles/pancakes- type, homemade, mix or frozen; syrup toppings or added fats

Tortillas- size, corn or flour; regular, low fat, fat free, or low carb

Other grain products such as couscous- added fat, gravy or sauces



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Dairy products- usually recorded in fluid ounces for liquids, cups or weight for solid foods

Milk- percent fat; fresh, evaporated, or dry powdered milk

Cheese/ cottage cheese- type of cheese; regular fat, low fat, reduced fat or fat free

Yogurt- flavored or plain; light, fat free, or sugar free

Cream cheese/ sour cream- regular, low fat, or fat free

Fats- usually recorded in teaspoons or tablespoons

Butter- whipped, stick

Margarine- regular, low fat, or fat free; stick or tub

Oil- type

Commercial salad dressings/ mayonnaise- flavor; regular, light, or fat free

Peanut butter- regular or reduced fat

Fruit- usually recorded in cups or size of piece

Fresh

Frozen without sugar

Canned- water, juice or light syrup pack

Vegetables- usually recorded in cups or size of piece

Fresh or raw- added fat such as a dip

Frozen/ canned- preparation method, sauces or fat added

Meat- usually recorded in ounces-cooked weight

Fish- type, preparation method, sauces or fat added

Poultry- type, white or dark meat, with or without skin, preparation method; sauces, fat, or gravy added

Red meat- type, cut of meat, preparation method; sauces, fat, or gravy added

Cold cuts/ processed meats- kind of meat; regular, low fat, fat free

Other protein foods- usually recorded in cups

Beans- dried or canned, fat added

Nuts- type; raw, oil roasted or dry roasted, salted or unsalted

Eggs/ egg substitute- size of egg, method of preparation, fat added

Snack foods- usually recorded in cups, weight, or number of pieces

Type- pretzels, crackers, popcorn, etc.

Brand name- flavor; regular fat, reduced fat, fat free

Soups- usually recorded in cups

Ready-to-serve, homemade, diluted, condensed; made with type of milk or water

Prepared foods (frozen dinners, package mixes, etc.)- usually recorded in cups or piece, or weight (Look at nutrition label on package)

Brand name

Description

Preparation method



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Mixed dishes- recorded in cups

Recipes using above checklist

Preparation method

Restaurant meals

Name of restaurant

Name of menu item

Preparation method (ask server if necessary)

Condiments added at the table

Best estimates of portion sizes

Nutrient Information:

You can be as detailed as you want with this information. You are encouraged to keep track of your protein grams and calories. It's difficult to keep track of these numbers in you head as the day goes on and you will want to know at the end of the day if you met your goals. If your physician or dietitian has suggested you keep track of your grams of carbs and fat, or if you are just interested for your own use, we have provided space for those nutrients too. To find this nutrition information you can use food labels, a food values book, or you can look up foods at usda.gov.

Physical Activity and Time:

Record your intentional physical activity such as walking, swimming, biking, strength training, yoga class, etc. You can also keep track of household chores, such as vacuuming, cleaning, window washing, and outside chores such as lawn mowing, raking, gardening, and car washing. Record the minutes or length of time for your activity.

Weekly Goals:

You may have set goals for yourself to keep on track or you may want to look at our list of suggested goals. You may want to put more work into food goals or maybe the time is right for working on lifestyle goals. Check the appropriate box at the end of the day.

Keeping track of your food, physical activity, and goals will make your weight loss or weight maintenance more successful. You can use the food portion of this meal diary to help you improve your eating plan by looking for problem areas such as time of day, location of eating, or foods that are contributing excess calories. If you have regained some pounds, keeping meal diary is a great way to get back on track. If you are maintaining your desired weight, occasional use of the meal diary will help keep you there.

Remember, ***“If you eat it, you own it.”*** Keep an honest meal diary!



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