

Eating styles

How we eat is just as important as what we eat. Eating styles have to do with when, where, and how a person eats. Some of us snack and pick all day long while others “save up” and don’t eat all day so they can “save” their calories for a big occasion. Many of the kids (and adults) we work with eat portions bigger than they physically need at all meals so they are getting more than they need all day. Those are the folks who were told to clean their plates and/or we need to eat *everything* to grow healthy and strong. (Or...our parents thought we needed to eat more than we wanted when we were kids so they pushed us to eat past our needs, making it harder to know what we need now!) Other kids are often not hungry in the morning and won’t eat breakfast, eat a small lunch because they are in a hurry to play with their friends, and then come home from school ravenous and snack from the minute they come home through dinner and often, dessert. Wonder why they aren’t hungry in the morning for breakfast?? So, what to do? Eating styles can really get in the way of being a healthy person. You may not need to totally change your eating habits, but adjusting them can make a tremendous difference in helping you reach your healthy lifestyle goals.

“*Snackers*” rarely sit down to have a proper meal and when they do they usually pick at it. They often eat while doing something else. “*Snackers* drastically underestimate how much they eat, and are often looking for something more to eat because the “snacks” they’ve been eating haven’t been enough to meet their basic requirements for nutrition and satiety (fullness and satisfaction of appetite). People who have a “*snacker*” eating style often do best if they either omit snacks completely and eat three nutritious meals a day, or if they do have three meals and two snacks a day (as is often recommended as a healthy way of eating), then to pre-pack your snacks into 100-200 calorie increments and stick with what you’ve allotted yourself. As with all meals, snacks should be eaten without any other distractions. We are all so busy, that “multi-tasking” is a common verb in most of our lives. It’s best to just focus on one activity at a time. Eating is one activity. Talking on the phone is another. Reading is another, and so on. Do I dare even mention watching TV??? We all need to pay attention...to what we are eating, much less everything else!! When you eat, just eat!

“*Savers*” are often erratic eaters, alternating between eating too much and too little. Not eating for long periods of time makes people hungry!! Hungry people don’t usually make wise choices. Calories are not really saved by skipping meals. When you don’t eat for a long period of time, your body thinks it is starving resulting in a slowed metabolism that is better able to store and conserve calories than burn them. Meaning, you need less overall calories in the long run than you would if you ate regular meals on a consistent basis. People who eat small meals and planned snacks have bodies that are constantly metabolizing. Eating something every three to four hours keeps your metabolism revved up. Instead of not eating to compensate for the possibility of eating a lot of high calorie foods at a special event, have a small snack an hour before you go to the party so you will not be so ravenous and eat so fast and so mindlessly that your brain doesn’t have enough time to get the “full” sign. The day after a big party or anytime you think you have overeaten, just get back to your regular eating. You can cut back a bit on fats, carbs, and calories, but don’t skip whole meals. For those out of the habit of eating breakfast (often because you are still full from the night before), start with a very small snack at breakfast time. For those that insist they are hungrier all day long if they eat

breakfast, have a snack at 10, then have lunch!! Those that eat a good breakfast and lunch tend to eat less at dinner time. Ideally, everyone should wake up in the morning just a little bit hungry (4 or so, on the fullness scale).

“*Clean plate*” eaters often don’t know when they are hungry or not. They are the folks who when they were children were told to eat everything on their plate because there were children in other places that didn’t have food, or that “your mother spent a lot of time preparing this meal/pie/whatever it is, or how often have we heard “I made it especially for you because I knew how much you liked...”. In any of these situations, it didn’t matter if you were hungry or not, you felt guilty if you didn’t eat it. First of all, what a person eats, does not affect anyone else but you!!! An inability to recognize fullness usually leads to eating larger and larger portions of food. “*Clean plate*” eaters need to learn how to pay attention to satiety as a signal to stop eating. Gradually decreasing portion sizes of meals and snacks over time will help you avoid being too hungry as your body adjusts to eating less. Try to ask yourself whether you are really hungry before you eat, and once you start eating, try to pay attention to your hunger and satisfaction cues. Know that you learned how to eat large portions so you can “unlearn” it also. Eating smaller portions is also a learned habit. Over time, your stomach will be satisfied with less food. Portion sizes when eating out are often much more than we need. Get in the habit of asking for a doggie bag before you begin to eat and take half of the meal home for another day. If you do this before you eat, you are removing the temptation to eat more than you need. Studies prove over and over, the larger the portion size; the more one will eat, no matter how hungry they were when they started.

Whether you are a “snacker”, a “saver”, or a “clean plater” eater, everyone also needs to be mindful of what they are eating and how fast. Slow down. Don’t do anything but just eat when you eat. Chewing the food thirty times is a bit much, but pay attention. Are you swallowing before you finish chewing? Do you have that next bite right up next to your mouth ready to go before you finish what you already have in your mouth? Mindful eating. Mindful living.