

Break These Rules to Lose!

You can (and should) eat dessert, carbs and snacks—and still drop pounds

By [Karen Ansel](#) Posted January 08, 2009 from [Woman's Day: February 1, 2009](#)

You don't snack. You "close" the kitchen after 8 p.m. And your pantry is loaded with lowfat and sugar-free foods. So why doesn't the scale budge? Maybe you're following the wrong advice. Losing weight isn't about when you eat or depriving yourself of favorite foods—it's about gradually cutting calories so you burn more than you eat. That's it, plain and simple. So toss the outdated diet advice. Here are 10 rules that were meant to be broken.



RULE stick with diet soda

THE REALITY Even though a diet drink may seem like a logical way to cut calories, watch out. While it's certainly better than the real stuff (a 12-oz can of cola can have up to 150 calories), studies show that sugar substitutes can backfire and cause you to eat more. For example, researchers at the University of Washington in Seattle found that people who drank diet soda in the midmorning consumed more calories at lunchtime than those who had regular cola or 1% milk instead. Experts aren't sure why artificial sweeteners prompt us to eat more, but they may interfere with our body's ability to sense when we're full. Plain seltzer water is a good fizzy substitute.

RULE steer clear of starchy veggies like carrots, corn, beets

THE REALITY "I've never met anyone who gained weight by eating too many carrots," says Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD, spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association and author of *The Flexitarian Diet*. In fact, one raw carrot has less than 6 grams of carbohydrates; a half-cup of cooked beets has only 8, and an ear of corn 14. That's a fraction of the 220 grams most women need in a day. Also worth noting: These veggies are rich in slowly digested fiber, which keeps you

feeling full. Also, they take time to eat, so your brain has a chance to register that you've had enough.

RULE avoid fast food

THE REALITY Don't get too excited: We're not saying you can make a weekly date with that bacon double cheeseburger. But you don't have to steer clear of fast-food restaurants totally. These days most of them have healthier options like grilled chicken sandwiches, salads with lowfat dressing, and yogurt parfaits. You can even have the greasy stuff occasionally—just think kid-size, not super-size. "A hamburger and small fries will run you less than 500 calories," says Keith T. Ayoob, EdD, RD, associate clinical professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University in Bronx, New York. Better yet, swap the fries for apple dippers (with caramel dipping sauce!) and you'll save 125 calories.

RULE no snacking

THE REALITY Snacking helps control your appetite, making you less likely to go overboard at meals. In fact, the National Weight Control Registry—the nation's largest study of people who have lost weight and kept it off long-term—found that



successful losers eat about four or five times a day. Trouble is, we often confuse snacking with nibbling on goodies like chips, candy and cookies. If you want snacking to work as part of your get-slim strategy, it has to be planned. That means scheduling one or two daily munchies of about 200 calories each. The best snack to keep you satisfied? One with a mix of protein and fiber: say, apple slices spread with a little peanut butter, whole-grain crackers and hummus, or lowfat yogurt with berries.

RULE always choose lowfat over full-fat

THE REALITY In some cases, having the lowfat version instead of the original can help you lose weight—especially when it comes to milk, cheese and yogurt. The trouble starts when lowfat leads you to inhale an entire bag of chips, box of cookies or pint of frozen yogurt. “Some people don’t feel as satisfied when they’re eating lowfat foods, so they overdo it or end up still craving the original,” says Blatner. The solution: Make desserts lower in calories and fat that taste good enough so a reasonable portion will satisfy you (see “Slimmed-Down Sweets,” page 110). Or go with a small amount of the real full-fat stuff: Think three Oreos, 15 chips, a half-cup of ice cream. ½ gram of fat. In fact, these foods can actually help you lose weight, because they’re water-rich and contain enough healthy fat to keep you satisfied. Olives also contain oleic acid, which research shows can help you eat less by sending “I’m full” signals from your intestine to your brain.

RULE the less meat you eat, the more weight you’ll lose

THE REALITY Meat-free doesn’t always equal low-cal. Think about it: pasta with cream sauce. French fries. Veggie quesadillas. They’re all made without meat, but they’re also oozing with fat and calories. “Just because something is vegetarian, don’t think it’s necessarily going to help you lose weight,” says Blatner. “There’s a big difference between eating lots of cheese, fried foods and packaged foods, and eating minimally processed fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes.” If you’re going meatless, make sure to double-check the calories on the nutrition label of vegetarian entrées, snack foods and sweets. And remember, lean cuts of red meat can be part of a healthy (and low-cal) diet.



RULE no eating after 8 p.m.

THE REALITY When you think of nighttime eating, you probably picture cartons of takeout, bags of chips or entire sleeves of cookies. No wonder eating after dark gets a bad rap! “The problem isn’t eating after eight, it’s *what* you’re eating—because it’s usually not carrots and celery,” says Ayoob. Meals and snacks that you have at night are no more fattening than if you ate them during the day, so if you can’t sit down to dinner until after 8 p.m., don’t sweat it. The key is not to eat an *additional* meal (or the equivalent in snacks) after you’ve finished dinner.

RULE dessert is off limits

THE REALITY Think of the occasional dessert as preventive medicine. It keeps you from feeling deprived, so you don’t eventually blow your diet on a binge. That said, there are tricks to indulging intelligently. The first is to consider eating sweet treats only when you’re out of the house, which makes it harder to go back for seconds. The second is portion control. And the third is compromise. “Dessert isn’t a freebie. You have to plan it into your calorie budget by either taking out something else or squeezing in extra exercise,” says Ayoob.