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Soup p.62
Pasta p.61
Pizza p.70
Chop p.65
Sandwich p.61
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**Shake your salt habit for good**

**Q** My doctor told me I need to follow a low-sodium diet due to high blood pressure. I've been sprinkling salt-free seasonings on my food, but I'm bored of their taste. What are some other ways I can spice up my meals?

**A** Salt enhances the flavor of food, but herbs, spices and condiments are other tasty options. Top meat dishes with a squeeze of lemon or lime or a shake of hot sauce. Sprinkle a teaspoon of grated Parmesan on your veggies, pasta or rice. Raid your spice rack to create salt-free combinations tailored to your preferences. Adding a small amount of a selection such as chili powder, cinnamon, oregano or turmeric can go a long way toward transforming the taste of the food you eat.

**Select the best foods to feel full**

**Q** No matter what I eat during my three meals each day, I always end up hungry an hour later. What foods would help me feel more satisfied?

**A** To start, steer clear of simple carbohydrates, such as white bread, which are digested quickly and thus make you feel hungrier faster. Instead, opt for foods that have staying power. Fill your plate with a healthful balance of these four types—and amounts—of food at each meal: 150 calories of a whole grain, like oatmeal, brown rice or whole-grain pasta; 150 calories of a lean protein, like eggs, chicken, fish or beans; an unlimited amount (but at least 2 cups) of fiber-filled fruits and vegetables; and 100 calories of a healthful fat, which you can find in avocado, chopped walnuts or cheese. That nutritious combination will be digested more slowly than processed foods, so you'll feel fuller. Here's one meal idea: a burrito bowl made from ¼ cup of cooked brown rice, ¾ cup of black beans and 3 cups of vegetables plus 3 tablespoons of guacamole. Those water-rich and fiber-filled ingredients will push on your stomach wall and trigger your brain to register that there's food in your belly. It's a combination that should keep you satiated for four to five hours.

**Ask All You... Do you have a diet or fitness question? Visit allyou.com/your-health.**
HEALTH EXPERT
Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD

Dodge detoxes

A friend of mine swears by a cleanse of pureed fruits and vegetables as a way to lose a few pounds. Is this sort of detox safe?

A

In short: No. A recent study in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine found that fad regimens such as juice detoxes don’t help people slim down. One likely reason? They help shed only water weight: pounds you’ll gain right back once you return to your normal eating habits. Experts also say juice diets can be dangerous. Because they don’t supply you with adequate calories or give you the balanced nutrients you need, they can cause an imbalance of electrolytes—minerals that regulate muscle function and blood pressure—as well as lead to low blood sugar. Those issues can be especially dangerous for people who have diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease or digestive conditions.

So what’s your best bet if you want to lose weight? Besides maintaining a well-balanced diet of varied foods, drinking plenty of water and exercising 150 minutes per week, log what you eat. Dieters who kept a food diary actually doubled their weight loss during a six-month Kaiser Permanente study. By recording their food intake, the dieters were more mindful of what they were consuming—which helped them break their bad eating habits for good.

* Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD, is the author of The Flexitarian Diet.

End late-night noshing

Q

You hear it a lot: Snacking after 8 p.m. can lead to weight gain. If that’s true, what can I do to keep from eating after dinner?

A

People who eat after 8 p.m. might be more at risk for obesity, a recent study found. Evening noshing is often done out of habit or boredom. Control after-dinner nibbles with two steps. First, enjoy a well-balanced dinner. You’ll feel more satisfied and be less likely to look for snacks. Dinners should be about 400 calories, with a balance of protein, smart carbs and produce, like skinless barbecue chicken, baked sweet potato wedges with cinnamon, and steamed broccoli with Parmesan.

Step 2: Shake up your routine. Do something different to bust boredom and break bad habits, such as playing a game or reading magazines in a quiet room. If you still need a nibble after dinner, keep it light (about 100 calories) and full of protein so blood sugars stay steady—the key to warding off hunger pangs. Try 15 almonds, 4 ounces of plain low-fat Greek yogurt or a stick of string cheese.

Clarify food-label confusion

Q

There are so many foods out there that boast low sugar, low carb or low GI (glycemic index). Which are best for losing weight?

A

Although such labels might be helpful when managing diabetes or another chronic condition, calories rule when it comes to shedding extra pounds. Foods labeled low sugar, low carb or low GI (which indicates the rate at which the food will affect your blood-sugar levels) could still be high in calories and fat. Generally, to achieve a healthy weight, aim for three 400-calorie meals as well as two 150-calorie snacks, for a total of 1,500 calories per day. Check serving sizes, too; eating too many low-carb foods will sabotage your weight-loss efforts. Remember, whenever you are planning to make changes to your diet to lose weight or to help manage a health condition, speak with your doctor or a dietitian.