

# Eating at Night

**The old saying goes, “Breakfast for a king, lunch for a prince, dinner for pauper.” And do you need to eat less, particularly carbohydrate at night. Here are some facts and practical tips to manage your eating later in the day.**

Can I still eat carbohydrates after 6pm? The simple answer is;- Yes you can - just make sure you don't overeat. It's over consumption of food late in the day, or “back-loading” calories as Ellen Coleman, leading US dietitian, calls it, which is the likely cause of weight gain related to night-time eating.



It's hard to find any conclusive evidence that carbohydrates or any food eaten at night is more likely to be stored as body fat. Metabolism drops when you are sleeping, but that simply lowers your daily energy expenditure. It is your 24-hour energy balance (energy in versus energy out) that really matters in weight gain or loss. If you want to lose weight it doesn't seem to matter if you eat three square meals or eat more often as long as your total energy intake remains the same.

## Let's get practical

Food eaten at night is not more likely to end up stored as body fat. Even so, you still need to think about the reasons why you eat too much at night and then implement some practical strategies to cut back on what you eat late in the day.

Lack of planning – If you don't eat enough during the day you risk getting hungry at night. If you skip breakfast, are too busy for lunch or forget to snack, you leave yourself open to overeating in the evening. By planning your food for the day and taking time to eat regularly you can satisfy your needs and avoid overeating late in the day.



Eating habits – Habits are powerful behavioural patterns that allow us to perform many of our daily tasks without conscious effort. Showering, dressing and teeth cleaning are good habits that for most of us happen on autopilot. Unfortunately, overeating at night also occurs on autopilot and this habit needs to be broken. Try serving the evening meal on a smaller plate or taking leftovers off the stove and placing them in the fridge immediately. These new habits will reduce the amount of food you eat at dinner.

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- ✘ Social pressure – Your diet may stay on track until you come home to sit down at the table with other people. You may feel obliged to eat everything that’s served by your caring partner, mother or friend. You can also simply overeat during long social meals. To manage this feeding pressure, make your diet plans known to those at home. Recruiting their support to serve less or change what you eat at dinner will work in your favour. And as for the belief that you should clean your plate, learn a new mantra, “It’s better to go in the waste than around my waist!”
  
- ✘ Emotional escape - After a stressful day, food can sooth and relax. Chocolate, ice cream, cake and chips work well at delivering instant relief. Eating is also an effective short-term strategy to beat night time boredom. Identifying an evening stress or boredom-food link is the first step. You then need to establish alternative emotional rewards. This is not always easy, but is an important aspect of successful weight management. Ask the question, “What can I do in the evening that would reduce the need to eat?” For example: call a friend, go for a walk or work on a hobby.

## **New guidelines**

- ✔ Catch up on your nutrition – The evening meal is an opportunity to achieve a balanced diet for that day. For example, if you’ve gone short on three serves of fruit during the day, aim to have some fruit salad for dessert. Eat a little less of your main dish if needed. If you’ve missed out on vegetables during the day, make your evening meal veggie-based; a stir fry, vegetable lasagne or a salad.
  
- ✔ Eat enough to get the bed - Unless you are an athlete or exercising strenuously in bed, you won’t need to carb-load at night. Serve a smaller portion, take the edge off hunger and then get to bed. If you are asleep, you won’t feel hungry until morning. Then you can start another day of nutritious eating with a healthy breakfast fit for a king. The old saying still works, and for practical reasons.



**“Remember, it’s better to go in the waste than around my waist!”**