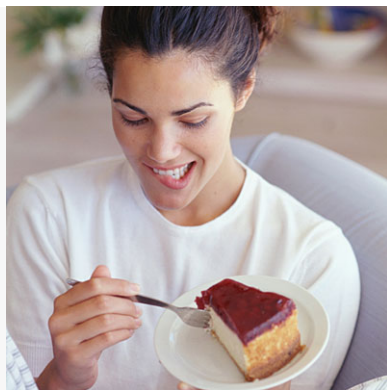




Your Tip-of-the-Day Diet and Fitness Calendar



Curb your sweet tooth

By Leslie Barrie

Got a late-night sugar craving that just won't quit? "To satisfy your sweet tooth without pushing yourself over the calorie edge, even in the late night hours, think 'fruit first,'" says Jackie Newgent, RD, author of *The Big Green Cookbook*. So resist that chocolate cake siren, and instead enjoy a sliced apple with a tablespoon of nut butter (like peanut or almond) or fresh fig halves spread with ricotta. Then sleep sweet, knowing you're still on the right, healthy track.



Stock up on these

While there are heaps of good-for-you foods out there, some key ingredients make it a lot easier to meet your weight-loss goals. Next grocery store run, be sure to place Newgent's top three diet-friendly items in your cart: balsamic vinegar (it adds a pop of low-cal flavor to veggies and salads), in-shell nuts (their protein and fiber keep you satiated), and fat-free plain yogurt (a creamy, comforting source of protein). "Plus, Greek yogurt also works wonders as a natural low-calorie base for dressings and dips—or as a tangier alternative to sour cream," says Newgent. Talk about a multitasker!



When to weigh

You've been following your diet for a whole week. Weigh to go! Now it's time to start tracking your progress (and make sure pesky pounds don't find their way back on). "It's best to step on the scale in the morning before eating or drinking—and prior to plunging into your daily activities," says Newgent. For the most reliable number, be sure to check your poundage at a consistent time, whether daily or weekly.



Police your portions

Does your steak take up more than half your plate? Think about cutting your serving of beef in half. That's because it's best to try and fill half your plate with veggies or a mixture of veggies and fresh fruit, says Newgent, so that it's harder to overdo it on the more caloric dishes (like cheesy potatoes or barbecue sauce-slathered ribs—yum!).



Combat cocktail hour

Is it ladies' night? If you know you'll be imbibing more than one drink, feel (and sip!) right by always ordering water between cocktails, says Newgent. That way, you won't rack up sneaky liquid calories (and ruin your inhibition to resist those mozzarella sticks!). But your H2O doesn't have to be ho-hum. "Make it festive by ordering the sparkling variety with plenty of fruit, like a lime, lemon, and orange wedge in a martini or highball glass," adds Newgent.



Turn your cheat day around

Feeling guilty about that giant ice cream sundae you enjoyed at your niece's birthday party? Don't beat yourself up! It takes a lot of calories—3,500—to gain a pound of body fat. "So really, that one off day doesn't usually result in any significant weight gain," says Newgent. It's about what you do the next day and the day after that's really important—so don't stay off-track. So be sure to whittle away at those extra calories over the next day or two, preferably by boosting exercise rather than eating too little. Starvation is not the healthy answer!



Say hello to H2O

Whether you're heading off to spin class, boot camp, or any other exercise, it's always important to hydrate so you can stay energized and have your best workout. Electrolyte-loaded athletic drinks, though, can be a source of unnecessary calories, so "drinking water is usually fine until you're exercising for more than one hour," says Newgent. At that point, feel free to go for regular Gatorade-type drinks (and their calories), which can give you a beneficial replenishment boost. But worry not if you like a little flavor during your fitness: There are now lower-cal sports drinks available, adds Newgent, so look out for 'em in your grocery aisles.



Be a weekend warrior

You've been following your diet plan to the letter, but enter: the weekend. To deal with three nights of eating temptations (think: birthdays, weddings, dinner parties), up your activity level for the week. For instance, try taking an extra 15-minute walk around your office each day, suggests Newgent. Then, go on and indulge a bit at the soiree, guilt free. Another party trick? Enjoy a 100-calorie snack before a celebration, which can help you eat fewer munchies at the event.



Fun up your food

It's easy to get in a diet rut, even if you're loading up on flavorful fruits and veggies. The solution? Have plenty of spices, fresh herbs, and lemons at your cooking beck and call. "It's amazing what a little dash of spice, sprinkle of herbs, pinch of lemon zest, or squirt of lime juice can do to liven up a dish—and your diet," says Newgent. The best part: They contain almost no calories. Experiment with your dinner, tonight!



Find healthy fast food

Have to work late tonight and need dinner—in a hurry? Not to worry. If you find fast food is your only option, pull up the restaurant's nutrition facts online before you go; you can make an informed decision ahead of time about what to order. "Nearly every quick-service restaurant has a relatively healthful option or two," says Newgent. We're thinking salads, chili, or grilled chicken. Some low-cal, healthy, on-the-run dishes: the vegetarian burrito bowl at Chipotle, the Bangkok curry at Noodles and Company, and the tomato basil bisque at Au Bon Pain.

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