



Weekend-proof your diet

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You work too hard at losing weight to let a couple of days undo everything.

Stay on track — and still have fun — with these smart-eating ideas from Fitness magazine.

Welcome to the weekend, when you kick off your shoes, pull on your jeans — and fling your diet out the window!

"After watching what you eat all week, it's natural to want to indulge a little," said Judith S. Beck, director of the Beck Institute for Cognitive Therapy and Research and author of "The Beck Diet Solution." The problem is that once you loosen the reins, it's easy to lose control. "I've seen people erase in two days every ounce of progress they made all week," said Rachel Beller, a registered dietitian and founder of the Beller Nutritional Institute in Beverly Hills, Calif.

Taking a step back for every step forward isn't just frustrating. It can lead to your giving up on slimming down.

"Eventually the yo-yoing can screw up your metabolism and make it even harder to drop pounds," said Joanne Lichten, author of "Dr. Jo's No Big Deal Diet."

To keep that from happening, try these stay-strong strategies for every situation, guaranteed to get you to Monday with your diet intact.

Happy hour after work

You're in the mood to unwind, but the more you drink, the more you munch. "Alcohol makes you hungry because it lowers your blood sugar," Lichten said.

Don't order your usual. "To keep it to one serving, get something you can nurse for the time you're there," said Marissa Lippert, author of "The Cheater's Diet." For example, if you guzzle white wine, order a light beer instead.

Go solo. Sharing a pitcher of your favorite alcoholic beverage with your friends may be more

economical, but you're better off, calorie-wise, ordering by the glass. "That way you can't lose sight of how much you're downing because someone is constantly topping you off," said Evelyn Tribole, co-author of "Intuitive Eating."

Cover up the snacks. If you seem to be magnetically drawn to that bowl of spicy nuts, drape a napkin over it. Even if you end up sneaking a few bites, you'll nibble 40 percent less, according to a recent study. "Inserting an extra step is always smart because it slows you down," said Brian Wansink, director of the Cornell University Food and Brand Lab and a Fitness magazine advisory board member.

Dinner out with girlfriends

You feel like a party pooper picking at a salad. "Research shows that women eat similarly when they're together, possibly as a way of relating to each other," said Sarah-Jeanne Salvy, assistant professor of psychology at the State University of New York at Buffalo. So if your posse is chowing down, chances are you will too.

Find a designated dieter. The good news is that the influence works both ways: You'll consume less if you're with light eaters. "Having just one fellow calorie-conscious person can really help you stay the course," Salvy said. "Sit next to each other for extra support."

Lead the charge. To avoid being swayed by someone's pasta Alfredo calorie bomb, be the first

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to order.

n Cut yourself off. Once your entree arrives, switch to a nonalcoholic beverage.

Doing chores

"When you're home, your day has less structure and it's a quick trip to the kitchen," Beck said. "Eating is how we deal with boredom, as well as a way to procrastinate."

n Serve here, eat there. Put your snack on a plate and take it to another room.

n Snack smarter. Adding a bit of healthy fat to your favorite nosh will fill you up faster. Partial to pretzels? Eat a handful with a dollop of hummus or peanut butter, Lippert said.

n Make it a mini meal. Grazing when you're seriously hungry is counter-productive: You'll eat more calories than you realize and still not feel satisfied. Better to feed your growling stomach half a turkey sandwich on whole-grain bread and some carrots.

A friend's dinner party

Being a guest at someone's house can pose a real dilemma for a dieter. "Not only do you have zero control over the menu, but some hosts are offended when you turn down the food they offer," Beck said.

n Don't arrive ravenous. It's tempting to skip lunch in anticipation of a big meal, "but that will lead to overeating, especially if dinner is served later than you expect," Tribole said. Instead, stick to your regular lunch and afternoon snack and you'll find it easier not to eat too many canapes.

n Stake out the salad bowl. Is the main dish something sinful, like a 40-pound lasagna? "Fortunately, people usually also serve salad," Beller said. So fill the majority of your plate with leafy greens.

n Learn to fend off food pushers. Sometimes saying "No thanks" isn't enough to stop an insistent host. The best way to derail her: "Tell her that you can't possibly have another bite, but if she is offering leftovers, you would love to take some home,"

Tribole suggests.

Up late watching a movie

It's past your usual bedtime, and you're on the prowl in the pantry. "If it's four hours since dinner, you're going to be hungry," Lichten said. "Your body is looking for a quick energy boost." Here come the midnight munchies!

n Do crunches. When you've got a hankering for chips, a banana isn't going to cut it. But chomping on something equally noisy will, Beller said. Crisp veggies such as carrots, sugar snap peas and jicama make an especially satisfying sound. Or keep crackling with light microwave popcorn; three cups will cost you less than 100 calories.

n Save the Oscar winner for prime time. Watch a show that's really engrossing and you'll eat up to 44 percent more than if you weren't distracted, a new study found.

Big blowout brunch

During the week, breakfast is typically fast, healthy and 300 calories, tops. But a leisurely weekend brunch is filled with decadent menu options. "Just a bagel and cream cheese can pack a whopping 600 calories," said Lisa Young, author of "The Portion Teller Plan."

n Think of it as lunch. You can still have midday eggs. Just don't let them be your first bite of the day. "If you wait until late morning to eat, you up the

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chance of overdoing it because you'll be so hungry," Lippert said. To prevent a blood sugar dip, rise and reach for a slow-to-digest, lighter pre-brunch meal, like nonfat Greek yogurt sprinkled with berries and sliced almonds.

n Share the special stuff. If you've been waiting all week for those golden chocolate chip pancakes, don't deny yourself. "Order a plate for the table and something more satisfying for yourself, like an omelet with vegetables and a bit of cheese," Lippert said. "A few indulgent bites will take care of your craving."

Sunday night scramble

Where did the weekend go? You've still got chores to do, e-mails to write, maybe work to catch up on. Usually around now, after all your diet lapses, you feel like throwing in the towel. "You may think you'll eat what you want and start fresh tomorrow," Young said. Don't.

n Seek heat. You can't scarf down something piping hot, so go slow with a steamy snack, like a chopped-up apple microwaved and sprinkled with cinnamon, Young recommends.

n Surrender sweetly. Reach for an individually wrapped treat, such as a piece of dark chocolate or a low-fat ice cream sandwich.

n Hit the sack. Sometimes people eat in response to exhaustion, turning to brownies when what they really need is rest, Tribble said. Consider calling it a night and waking up early Monday morning to finish whatever you have left. Tomorrow, after all, is a new day.

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