



Weekend-proof your diet

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Fitness magazine

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.

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," says 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.

Friday

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. "Plus, it lifts your inhibitions, so you'll eat just about anything."

» Don't order your usual. You're more likely to have a second round when you're drinking your fave.

"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 margaritas 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 Tribble, 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 advisory board member.

Dinner out with girlfriends

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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 to order.

"Make a healthy choice up front," Salvy said.

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

"You don't need the extra calories to wash down your food," said Connie Diekman, a registered dietitian and director of university nutrition at Washington University in Saint Louis.

Saturday

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."

» Serve here, eat there. Put your snack on a plate and take it to another room. Having to get up and walk to the kitchen to get more food interrupts mindless eating, Wansink said.

» 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 advised.

» 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; it's the same amount of calories as a few bites of a protein bar (around 150) and much healthier, Beller said.

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.

» 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," Tribble said.

Instead, stick to your regular lunch and afternoon snack and you'll find it easier not to eat too many canapes.

» 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.

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» 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," Tribble suggested.

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!

» 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.

» 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 study found.

"When you're not paying attention to the way a food tastes or smells, the sensory satiety center in your brain isn't triggered, and you'll keep eating," explained Alan Hirsch, neurological director of the Smell and Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago. So watch that half-hour sitcom on your DVR instead.

Sunday

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." "And that's without the lox."

» 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 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.

» 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 suggested. "A few indulgent bites will take care of your craving."

» Don't linger. Part of the reason you eat more with a group is that you're sitting at the table longer, Wansink said. When you finish, have your plate removed. If the gang isn't ready to break up after everyone has stopped eating, suggest moving outside to a nearby bench or going for a walk. Whatever you do, don't order more coffee. That's when you start grazing.

Sunday night scramble

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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.

» 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 recommended. Or drink some sugar-free hot cocoa or a cup of tea.

» Surrender sweetly. Is that pint of Ben & Jerry's in the freezer calling your name? Now is not the time to see if you can eat only two spoonfuls of New York Super Fudge Chunk. To make it more likely that you'll keep things under control, reach for an individually wrapped treat, such as a piece of dark chocolate or a low-fat ice cream sandwich.

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

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