

## Health

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### **Change bad nighttime snacking habits**

Why do we snack at night? The answers can include stress, boredom, loneliness, habit, suggestive TV ads, eating too little during the day and pressure from friends and family. For some reason, our tendency to grab nutrient-poor foods (such as the chips and dips, peanuts and chocolate!) in out-of-control portions increases as the day goes on. Here are a few suggestions about how to get through the evening without going to bed feeling like you really overdid the snacking.

**Figure out your pattern of eating.** Nutritionists suggest keeping a food journal for at least one week. Write down what you eat, how much, where and who is with you at the time. In addition, you want to make a note about how you feel before, during and after you eat. Rate your hunger on a scale of zero to 10: zero is very hungry with physical symptoms, and 10 is feeling stuffed. You'd be surprised how much nibbling and snacking you do during the day that adds calories and weight, but we're often not even aware that we're eating.

**Consider what triggers your eating.** When you have completed a one-week food journal, look at the patterns and consider what it is that triggers your eating. Why are you eating? Are you bored, lonely, sad or stressed? Do you always eat junk food and snacks when you're alone? Or maybe you eat after you engage in a particular activity. For example, do certain people cause stress in your life and make you want to eat? Perhaps conflicts drive you to chocolate; feeling confused about what to do makes you think about ice cream; and being overwhelmed with responsibilities brings up the thought of cookies.

**Find healthful alternatives.** The most helpful ways to take your mind off food will be those that match the need. If the problem is sadness, talking to a friend might help. If you are bored, cleaning the house might help, or you could volunteer for a community outreach program. Excellent stress relievers include meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, exercise and walking. Find healthful ways to take care of yourself that don't include food.

**Don't fast during the day.** Sometimes people eat at night because they don't eat during the day. The pattern will result in the body quickly getting used to being fed at a certain hour, overeating and weight gain. Stop the "fast and feast" pattern by eating small, healthful meals and snacks during the day to maintain a feeling of fullness.

**Make smart choices.** If you're truly hungry at night and need a snack, make sure that you make smart choices by reading food labels and watching portion size. Low-calorie snacks such as fresh fruit, a glass of milk and a graham cracker, raw vegetables with a low-fat or nonfat dip and sorbet are healthful and can help you feel less hungry.

**Give yourself time.** Sometimes it's hard to break habits such as eating snacks at night. Be patient with yourself, don't take an "all or nothing" approach, and understand that it takes 21 days to develop new habits.