

EATING WELL

Good News: There is no such thing as the perfect diet! There is only the right diet for you. But how can you tell what that is?

One way to is to practice mindful eating:

- Slow down and limit distractions while eating
- Pay attention to your inner sense of hunger, fullness, and satisfaction
- Notice, without judgment, the way that your body and mind react to different foods and ways of eating

“But how can I tell if I’m eating right?”

Here are some signs:

- You rarely feel extremely hungry or extremely full
- You consume a variety of foods from all food groups
- You don’t skip meals
- You have regular bowel movements
- Your energy level is mostly stable throughout the day
- You feel satisfied and not sluggish or bloated after meals
- Your weight is relatively stable
- Your mood and mental focus are not affected by your eating

Of course, food isn’t the only thing that can impact how you feel. Other factors such as stress, sleep, exercise, and environment can affect all of the above as well.

“Why is it so important not to skip meals or get too hungry?”

When you don’t eat enough, you’re likely to experience these effects:

- Physical: Your metabolism will slow down, causing your body to store energy rather than spend it
- Emotional: You’ll feel tired, sluggish, moody and irritable.
- Mental: You’ll have difficulty with attention, memory, and concentration
- Behavioral: The hungrier you are, the more likely you are to overeat and make poor food choices at your next meal

“Don’t I need to eat certain types of foods and nutrients?”

If you’re feeling unsure about how to balance your nutrition throughout the day, or you’re seeing signs that your body is unhappy with your current nutrient intake, it might be helpful to think in terms of food groups: Fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, and dairy.

Ideally your diet would consist of a variety of foods from each of these groups, but if there are foods that you don’t enjoy, it’s often possible to get the same nutrients from other foods. Seek guidance if you’re unsure about possible substitutions.

**Schedule an
online session
with a SHOP
Health Coach:
shop.ucsc.edu**



“Do I need to count calories or grams or...?”

No. Unless a dietitian has advised you to do so for medical reasons, you do not need to count anything. In fact, counting can cause you to ignore your body’s feedback about what, when, and how it feels best for you to eat.

Also, it’s important to know that the nutrition “facts” you see on food labels are actually approximations and don’t accurately predict how your body will digest and utilize foods.

“What about the _____ diet?”

Q: Whole30, paleo, macros, intermittent fasting, raw vegan, superfoods, ketogenic, low-fat, low-carb, detoxing/cleansing, juice fasting, name brand diets, fad diets... what do they all have in common?

A: They don’t work! They may seem to work for a few weeks or even up to a year, but they aren’t sustainable in the long run. A major downside of following a diet is that listening to food and eating rules keeps you from listening to your body.

“I’m not following a diet, I’m just eating healthy.”

Any form of eating that involves following rules about what, when, or how to eat is a diet. Instead of focusing on how you think you should be eating, try focusing on how you want to eat. What way of eating feels nourishing and sustainable for you?

“But aren’t some foods better than others?”

Surprise! There’s actually no such thing as “good” or “bad” foods. There’s only what works for you and what doesn’t. Our bodies react differently to foods based on a variety of factors:

genetics, microbiome/gut flora, stress & emotions, exercise habits, sleep, age, sex, body composition, hormone levels, and metabolism.

Your digestion is also affected by how quickly you eat, how thoroughly you chew your food, and even how you feel about your food! So, what is “healthy” for you may not be healthy for someone else, and even your personal nutrition needs vary from moment to moment.

“Ok, but isn’t it better if I don’t eat _____?”

In order to have a peaceful relationship with food, it’s important not to eliminate foods from your diet for non-medical reasons. When we avoid foods unnecessarily we create cycles of deprivation, guilt, and overeating. All foods can fit into a healthy and balanced diet.

“Do I need to weigh myself?”

No. Fixating on weight is more likely to lead to disordered eating than healthy eating. If your weight is unstable, you’ll be able to notice without having to weigh yourself.

“How do I know if I need to lose weight?”

Start by letting go of comparing your body to others. It’s normal to gain a little in college, but if you are rapidly losing or gaining weight that is a good reason to see a dietitian. Otherwise, focus on improving your eating habits rather than your weight.

You are the best expert on what your body needs to feel great. Practice listening to your internal signals of hunger, fullness and satisfaction to tap into your body's wisdom!

Slug Tip!