

How to Set a SMART Nutrition Goal

If you would like to make changes in your diet, experts recommend a Behaviour Modification approach to increase the chances of success. A simplified summary of this approach is:

1. **Set a goal**
2. **Monitor the goal** to determine if you are on track
3. **Problem-solve** if you are not on track so that you get back on track

I. Set a Goal

Setting a [SMART goal](#) enhances the chances of success.

A SMART goal is:

Specific: The goal is clear and as precise as possible about what you want to do.

Measurable: The goal has a number in it so that you can monitor it and track your progress.

Actionable: The goal relates to a behaviour: something you can do. For example, in order to lose weight (a final outcome) a person sets nutrition and physical activity goals (both of which are actionable).

Relevant: The goal aligns with your values and long-term objectives. It is meaningful for you.

Time-bound: The goal has a time frame (e.g. daily, weekly, monthly).

Below is one way to set a SMART nutrition goal.

Step 1: Estimate your daily calorie needs

Everyday we consume food and beverages to provide us with the nutrients and energy (i.e. calories) our body needs to function.

The amount of energy that the body needs varies from person to person, based on factors such as age, weight, gender and physical activity. Several equations have been developed to estimate the body's energy needs. They are not perfect, but they provide us with a starting point to set a nutrition goal. The [Harris-Benedict equation](#) is one of these equations. It has three calculations:

Estimate your Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR).

This is the number of calories your body needs each day for physiological processes such as circulating blood and maintaining body temperature.

To estimate your BMR, enter your height, weight, age, and gender into the [imperial BMR calculator](#) (pounds, inches) or [metric BMR calculator](#) (kilograms, centimetres).

Note: After you hit "calculate", your BMR will appear in a green bar above where you entered your numbers.

My Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR) is estimated to be _____ calories per day

Determine your level of physical activity

Besides burning calories to fuel your physiological processes, your body also burns calories when your muscles work (i.e. during physical activity). The Harris-Benedict equation factors in physical activity by using a physical activity factor. Physical activity is placed into five broad categories, each of which has a corresponding physical activity factor:

| PA Factor | Category | Description |
|-----------|-------------------|---|
| 1.2 | Sedentary | Little or no exercise |
| 1.375 | Lightly active | Light exercise/sports 1-3 days/week |
| 1.55 | Moderately active | Moderate exercise/sports 3-5 days/week |
| 1.725 | Very active | Hard exercise/sports 6-7 days a week |
| 1.9 | Extra active | Very hard exercise/sports & physical job or 2x training |

Select a category that best represents your level of physical activity. If your activity level does not fit neatly into one of these categories, you can estimate a factor between two categories. For example, if are more than lightly active, but not quite moderately active, you can estimate 1.45 as your physical activity factor.

My physical activity factor is _____

Estimate your daily calorie needs

Finally, multiply your BMR by your physical activity factor to estimate your daily calorie needs.



I estimate that my body needs _____ calories per day.

Step 2: Determine a daily nutrition calorie target based on your weight goal

Calculate your daily nutrition calorie target using one of the 3 options below, based on your weight goal.

I wish to maintain my weight

If your goal is to remain at the same weight, your daily nutrition calorie target is the same as your daily calorie needs (i.e. the same as calculated in Step 1).

My nutrition calorie target to maintain my weight is _____ calories per day

I wish to lose weight

If your goal is to lose weight, your daily nutrition calorie target should be less than your daily calorie needs. In other words, to lose weight you need to consume less calories than your body needs: You need to have a calorie deficit. See "[The Simple Science of Weight Loss](#)" for more information. Additional information we wish to add to the video is that alcohol provides 7 calories per gram.

A rule of thumb that can be helpful in determining a calorie deficit is:

- A deficit of 250 calories a day may lead to approximately ½ pound (¼ kg) of weight loss per week.
- A deficit of 500 calories a day may lead to approximately 1 pound (½ kg) of weight loss per week.

To calculate your daily nutrition calorie target for weight loss, subtract the number of calories for desired weight loss from your estimated daily calorie needs from Step 1.



My estimated daily
calorie needs

Calorie deficit

My daily nutrition
calorie target

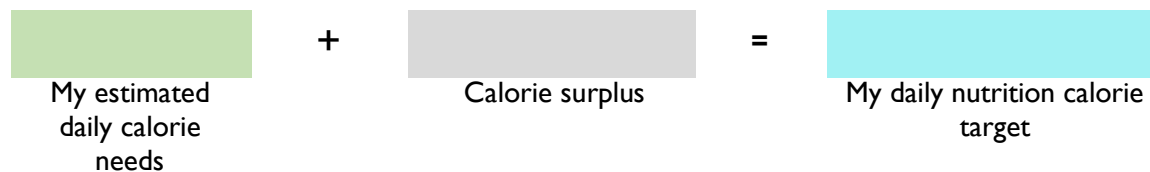
My nutrition calorie target to lose weight is _____ calories per day

Note: To ensure that you meet your daily nutrient needs, it is not recommended to set a daily calorie target of less than 1200 calories a day for women or 1,500 calories a day for men.

I wish to gain weight

If your goal is to gain weight, your daily nutrition calorie target should be greater than your daily calorie needs. In other words, to gain weight you need to consume more calories than your body needs: You need to have a calorie surplus.

To calculate your daily nutrition calorie target for weight gain, add calories (try somewhere between 200 and 400) to your estimated daily calorie needs from Step 1.



My nutrition calorie target to gain weight is _____ calories per day

Step 3: Determine your SMART nutrition goal

We eat food; not calories. In this step, you will translate your daily nutrition calorie target to a SMART nutrition goal.

Below is the daily recommendation for the number of food servings in 5 categories of food.

Use the table to set your nutrition goal from the daily nutrition daily calorie target you calculated above. Write your goal in the box below.

| Daily Calorie Target | # Servings Vegetables and Fruit | # Servings Grain Foods | # Servings Protein Foods | # Servings oil/fats | # Calories of "other" foods |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1500 | 6 aim for 4 vegetables, 2 fruit | 3 | 3 | 2 | 150 |
| 1750 | 7 aim for 4 vegetables, 3 fruit | 3.5 | 3.5 | 2 | 175 |
| 2000 | 8 aim for 5 vegetables, 3 fruit | 4 | 4 | 3 | 200 |
| 2250 | 9 aim for 6 vegetables, 3 fruit | 4.5 | 4.5 | 3 | 225 |
| 2500 | 10 aim for 6 vegetables, 4 fruit | 5 | 5 | 3 | 250 |
| 2750 | 11 aim for 7 vegetables, 4 fruit | 5.5 | 5.5 | 3 | 275 |
| 3000 | 12 aim for 7 vegetables, 5 fruit | 6 | 6 | 3 | 300 |
| Notes | Consume more vegetables than fruit | Choose whole grain foods frequently | Choose plant protein foods often | Focus on plant oils such as olive oil | Aim for 10% or less of your daily calories from "other" foods |

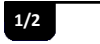


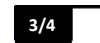
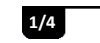


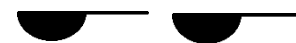

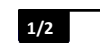




My SMART Nutrition Goal

Every day I will consume:

- _____ servings of vegetables and fruit
- _____ servings of grain foods
- _____ servings of protein foods
- _____ servings of oil/fats
- _____ calories of “other” food

Serving Sizes

(For more detail on the size of a serving, see the “Average Calorie Content of Food” table below)




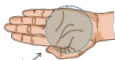
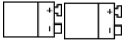


| Category | What is one serving |
|---|--|
| Vegetables and Fruit |  1/2 cup of frozen, fresh or canned fruit or vegetables  1 piece of fruit |
| Protein foods |  1/2 75 grams (about 1/2 cup) cooked meat, poultry or shellfish  3/4 3/4 cup beans, lentils, yogurt  1/4 1/4 cup nuts or seeds  1 1 cup milk or soy beverage  50 grams cheese  2 Tablespoons (30 ml) peanut butter |
| Grain Foods |  1 slice bread, 1 small tortilla  1/2 1/2 cup cooked grains (e.g. rice, quinoa) or pasta  1/2 bagel, 1/2 pita  30 g cold cereal  3/4 3/4 cup hot cereal |
| Fats/oils e.g oils, butter, margarine, salad dressings, and mayonnaise. |  1 Tablespoon (15 ml) |

1 cup = 250 ml, 3/4 cup = 185 ml, 1/2 cup = 125 ml, 1/4 cup = 65 ml

Tools for Accurate Measurement of Serving Sizes

| Measuring cups | Measuring spoons | Kitchen scale |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |

Helpful Visuals for Serving Sizes

| Measurement Size | Helpful Visual |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| ½ cup (125 ml, 4oz.) | tennis ball  , computer mouse  |
| 75 grams (½ cup) cooked meat, seafood | Deck of cards  , palm of the hand  |
| 50 grams cheese | 2, 9-volt batteries  |
| 1 tablespoon | wine cork  , 3 dice  |

2. Monitor the goal

Now that you have a SMART nutrition goal, you need to determine if you are on track with your goal. To help you with this, we have developed a nutrition monitoring sheet.

How to use this worksheet

- **Begin by entering your goal** for the number of servings in each category (or calories of “Other” foods) in the row “My goal for the day” at the bottom of the sheet.
- **Throughout the day, record** (as accurately as possible) the number of servings (or calories of “Other” foods) you consume. Record as close to the time you consume as possible, as your memory will be fresh.
- **At the end of the day, add up** the number of servings in each category (and calories of “Other” foods) and record the total in the row “My total for the day”. Then, calculate the difference between your goal and what you actually consumed. For example, if your goal was 6 servings of grain foods and you consumed 8 servings of grain foods, the difference is +2 (you consumed 2 servings more than your goal).

Notes

- Print out the worksheet and always have it with you.
- See the example sheet to get an idea of how to use it.
- Memorize the serving sizes.
- Record in the “Other foods and drinks” column the foods/drinks you consume that do not fit into the other categories. These foods include junk foods (e.g. burgers, hot dogs, French fries etc.), snack foods (e.g. potato chips, tortilla chips, pretzels etc.), desserts (cake, cookies, pie etc.), candy (e.g. chocolate, toffee etc.), ice cream, alcohol and sugary drinks (e.g. Coke, Sprite, Iced teas, fruit drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, Snapple, orange and other juices).
- We have included columns for you to indicate the quality of the foods you consume. For example, if you have a serving of tofu at dinner you can place a check mark (✓) in the column “Plant protein”. Your goal is to see many check marks when you review your sheet at the end of the day.
- Since it is recommended to have more vegetables than fruit (and our serving recommendations for vegetables and fruit were based on more vegetables than fruit), we have included an additional column for you to separate fruit and vegetables. If you have 2 servings of blueberries you will record 2 servings in the “total servings” column and also indicate 2 servings in the “# F” column, because blueberries are considered fruit. This way, at the end of the day, you will be able to quickly determine if you had more vegetables than fruit by looking at these totals.
- If you can measure what you consume, do so. This will increase accuracy. Helpful kitchen tools include measuring cups, measuring spoons and a kitchen scale.
- If you can't measure, estimate as best as you can using the “Visual for Serving sizes”.
- Be as specific as possible when describing the food/drinks you consume. For example, enter “Tuna sandwich made with 2 slices of whole grain bread, 1 teaspoon low-fat mayonnaise and ½ can (50 grams) of tuna packed in water”, rather than “Tuna sandwich” or “Tuna sandwich on whole wheat bread”.
- Sometimes you will have to estimate. For example, if you have a slice of your homemade vegetable lasagne you will have to estimate how many servings of grains (the pasta), vegetables (the veggie sauce) and protein (the cheese) are in that serving. Use the “Visual for Serving sizes” (especially if you didn't make the food) or calculate if you know how much of each ingredient is in the recipe.
- You do not need to record water and other beverages that have no calories such as black tea or coffee and diet drinks. You also don't need to record milk or sugar in coffee/tea if you only use a little. However, if you put a lot of milk or sugar, or you use a small amount frequently, you should record.
- Other things you do not need to record are spices and other ingredients you use in a small amount (e.g. sprinkle of Parmesan cheese or small amount of sour cream).
- You can use this sheet to plan a day of healthy eating ahead of time. Complete the sheet the day before and simply check off everything on the worksheet as you consume it. If you consume more (or less) than planned, you must add it to (or subtract if from) the completed sheet.
- FYI: One teaspoon (tsp) of sugar has 16 calories. Using 3 teaspoons of sugar in a day (e.g. 1 tsp each in 2 coffees, 1 tsp in a bowl of oatmeal) would be a total of 48 calories of sugar (3x16) over 2 entries in the “Other foods and drinks” category.
- FYI: One tablespoon of oil has about 120 calories, 1 Tablespoon of butter, margarine or regular mayonnaise have about 100 calories

Nutrition Monitoring Sheet

| Date | # Servings Vegetables and Fruit | | # Servings Grain Foods | | # Servings Protein Foods | | # Servings Fat/Oil | | # Calories of "Other" Foods/Drinks |
|--|--|-----|--|---|--|--|--|-------------------------------|---|
| | | # V | # F | Rice, pasta, bread, oats, cereal, quinoa etc. | ✓ whole grain | Beans, nuts, tofu, meat, fish, eggs, cheese etc. | ✓ plant protein | oils, butter, mayo, margarine | ✓ plant oil |
| Breakfast | | | | | | | | | |
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| Mid-morning snack | | | | | | | | | |
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| Lunch | | | | | | | | | |
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| Mid-afternoon snack | | | | | | | | | |
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| Dinner | | | | | | | | | |
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| Evening snack | | | | | | | | | |
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| | | | | | | | | | |
| My total for the day | | | | | | | | | |
| My goal for the day | | | | | | | | | |
| Difference (+/-) | | | | | | | | | |
| Notes | Aim for more vegetables than fruit | | Choose whole grain foods frequently | | Choose plant protein foods often | | Focus on plant oils (E.g olive oil, vegetable oil) | | Aim for 10% or less of your daily calories from "other" foods |
| Serving sizes (for more detail, see "Average Calorie Content of Food" table) | ½ cup (125 ml, 4 oz.) of frozen, fresh or canned fruit or vegetables, or one piece of fruit. | | 1 slice bread; ½ bagel or pita, 1 small tortilla; ½ cup cooked grains (e.g. rice, quinoa, barley) or pasta; 30 grams cold cereal; ¾ cup hot cereal | | 75 grams (about ½ cup) cooked meat, poultry, fish or shellfish; ¾ cup beans or lentils; ¼ cup nuts or seeds; 1 cup milk; ¾ cup yogurt; 50 grams cheese | | 1 tablespoon (15 ml) | | |

Example of Completed Nutrition Monitoring Sheet

| Date January 1 st , 2020 | # Servings Vegetables and Fruit | | # Servings Grain Foods | | # Servings Protein Foods | | # Servings Fat/Oil | | # Calories of "Other" Foods/Drinks |
|---|--|-----|--|---------------------|---|-----------------------|--|-------------------|---|
| | # V | # F | Rice, pasta, bread, oats, cereal, quinoa etc. | ✓ whole grain | Beans, nuts, tofu, meat, fish, eggs, cheese etc. | ✓ plant protein | oils, butter, mayo, margarine | ✓ plant oil | Junk & snack foods, sugary drinks, alcohol, cakes, candies, sugar etc. |
| Breakfast | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 slices whole grain bread | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 Tbsp non-hydrogenated margarine | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 Tbsp low-sugar strawberry jam | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 cup honeydew melon | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2 | 2 | 2 | ✓ | | | 1 | ✓ | 50 |
| Mid-morning snack | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 hardboiled egg | | | | | | | | | |
| 40 grams cheese | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 1/2 | | | | |
| | | | | | 1/2 | | | | |
| Lunch | | | | | | | | | |
| 1/2 cup pasta | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 cup vegetable pasta sauce | | | | | | | | | |
| Green salad: 1 cup lettuce and | | | | | | | | | |
| 1/2 cup chopped vegetables | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 Tbsp low-fat salad dressing | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2 | 2 | 1 | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 1 | | | | | 1 | ✓ | |
| Mid-afternoon snack | | | | | | | | | |
| Granola bar | | | | | | | | | |
| 3/4 cup low-fat yogurt | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 1 | | | | 150 |
| Dinner | | | | | | | | | |
| 3/4 cup chickpea curry | | | | | | | | | |
| 1/2 cup white rice | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 cup roasted vegetables | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 Tbsp olive oil for roasting | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | ✓ | | | |
| | | | | | | | 1 | ✓ | |
| Evening snack | | | | | | | | | |
| 1/4 cup dry roasted almonds | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 1 | ✓ | | | |
| My total for the day | | | | | | | | | |
| | 8 | 6 | 2 | 4 | | 4 | 3 | | 200 |
| My goal for the day | | | | | | | | | |
| | 8 | 5 | 3 | 4 | | 4 | 3 | | 200 |
| Difference (+/-) | | | | | | | | | |
| | 0 | +1 | -1 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | | 0 |
| Notes | | | | | | | | | |
| | Aim for more vegetables than fruit | | Choose whole grain foods frequently | | Choose plant protein foods often | | Focus on plant oils (E.g olive oil, vegetable oil) | | Aim for 10% or less of your daily calories from "other" foods |
| Serving sizes (for more detail, see "Average Calorie Content of Food" table) | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1/2 cup (125 ml, 4 oz.) of frozen, fresh or canned fruit or vegetables, or one piece of fruit. | | 1 slice bread; 1/2 bagel or pita, 1 small tortilla; 1/2 cup cooked grains (e.g. rice, quinoa, barley) or pasta; 30 grams cold cereal; 3/4 cup hot cereal | | 75 grams (about 1/2 cup) cooked meat, poultry, fish or shellfish; 3/4 cup beans or lentils; 1/4 cup nuts or seeds; 1 cup milk; 3/4 cup yogurt; 50 grams cheese | | 1 tablespoon (15 ml) | | |

Monitoring Your Monitoring

Besides monitoring your daily nutrition goal, you can go one step beyond and monitor your monitoring. To do this, at the end of the day record in a calendar whether you have achieved your goal. If you did achieve your goal, place a “✓” in that date on the calendar. If you did not achieve your goal, place an “✗” in that date on the calendar. Finally, if you did not complete your monitoring sheet for the day, place a “?” in that date on the calendar.

The benefit of monitoring your monitoring is that you can see, at a glance, how frequently you are on track. Below are “Monitoring your Monitoring” sheets for two people. Who is having greater success? It is easy to see from the calendars.

**Monitoring Your Monitoring
Person 1**

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|
| | | | | 1 ✓ | 2 ✓ | 3 ✗ |
| 4 ? | 5 ✓ | 6 ✗ | 7 ✓ | 8 ✓ | 9 ✓ | 10 ? |
| 11 ? | 12 ✓ | 13 ✓ | 14 ✓ | 15 ✗ | 16 ✓ | 17 ✓ |
| 18 ✓ | 19 ✓ | 20 ✓ | 21 ✓ | 22 ✓ | 23 ✓ | 24 ✗ |
| 25 ✗ | 26 ✓ | 27 ✓ | 28 ✓ | 29 ✓ | 30 ✓ | 31 ? |
| Notes | | | | | | |

**Monitoring Your Monitoring
Person 2**

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|
| | | | | 1 ? | 2 ✓ | 3 ✗ |
| 4 ✓ | 5 ✓ | 6 ✗ | 7 ✓ | 8 ✗ | 9 ✗ | 10 ? |
| 11 ? | 12 ✓ | 13 ✓ | 14 ✓ | 15 ? | 16 ? | 17 ✓ |
| 18 ✓ | 19 ✓ | 20 ✗ | 21 ✗ | 22 ✗ | 23 ✗ | 24 ? |
| 25 ? | 26 ✓ | 27 ✓ | 28 ✓ | 29 ✗ | 30 ✗ | 31 ✗ |
| Notes | | | | | | |

Average Calorie Content of a Serving of Food

Listed below is the average calorie content of a serving of food (and a few beverages). The calorie content of a serving of food can vary considerably—especially with animal foods such as meat or yogurt, or grain foods such as bread or cereal—so this is just a guide. For exact calorie content of foods read [food labels](#) or consult websites such as [Food Data Central](#).

| Vegetables and Fruit One serving, unless otherwise indicated, is ½ cup (125 ml, 4 oz.) of frozen, fresh or canned fruit or vegetables. | Average calories per serving | |
|--|------------------------------|------------|
| Cucumber, lettuce (1 cup), zucchini, bean sprouts (1 cup), endive (1 cup), mushrooms, radish | 7-10 | Vegetables |
| Bok choy (1 cup), cauliflower, broccoli, bell peppers, eggplant, turnip, tomato, cabbage (1 cup), Brussels sprouts, celery (2 stalks), okra, spinach (1 cup) | 11-20 | |
| Asparagus (6 spears), pumpkin, green/yellow beans, carrots, fennel (1 cup) | 21-30 | |
| Onion, beets, leeks (1 cup), squash, kale (1 cup) | 31-50 | |
| Peas, potato ¹ | 60-70 | |
| Corn, sweet potato, yams | 80-100 | |
| Rhubarb | 15 | Fruit |
| Strawberries, watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, papaya | 20-30 | |

| | | |
|---|---------|--|
| Raspberries, blackberries, pineapple (fresh) | 31-40 | |
| Blueberries, peach (1), kiwi (1 large), cherries (10), grapes | 41-50 | |
| Apricot (3), orange (1), nectarine (1), mango, plum (2), pineapple (canned) | 61-70 | |
| Figs (2 fresh), apple (1), grapefruit (1), tangerine (2) | 75-100 | |
| Pear (1), banana (1) | 100-110 | |
| Avocado (½ medium fruit) | 160 | |

¹Potatoes are one of the most calorie dense vegetables: a small potato (170 g) has about 130 calories, a medium potato (213 g) has 165 calories and a large potato (369 g) has 280 calories.

| Protein foods One serving, unless otherwise indicated, is 75 grams (½ cup) cooked meat, poultry, fish or shellfish; ¾ cup beans or lentils; ¼ cup nuts; 1 cup milk; ¾ cup yogurt; 50 grams cheese | Average calories per serving | |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Soy beverage | 130 | Plant Protein Foods |
| Tofu ² | 140 | |
| Beans, cooked and canned, lentils (cooked) | 170-200 | |
| Peanut butter (2 Tbsp) | 190 | |
| Nuts and seeds | 200-220 | |
| Fish | 75-130 | Animal Protein Foods |
| Tuna, canned in water | 80 | |
| Salmon, canned | 110 | |
| Chicken ² | 140 | |
| Eggs (2) | 150 | |
| Pork ² | 160 | |
| Beef ² | 170 | Dairy Protein Foods |
| Milk (skim) | 85 | |
| Yogurt | 90-160 | |
| Milk (1%) | 100 | |
| Milk (2%) | 120 | |
| Hard cheese (reduced fat) | 130-150 | |
| Milk (3.25%) | 150 | |
| Hard cheese (regular) | 200 | |

² Calories per serving is an average. Calories per serving varies depending on cut of meat, fat content (e.g. fat free vs regular yogurt), how food is cooked (e.g. roasting vs frying) or type of tofu (e.g. soft vs firm).

| Grain Foods One serving, unless otherwise indicated, is 1 slice bread (35 grams) ; ½ bagel or pita; 1 small tortilla; ½ cup cooked grains (e.g. rice, oats, barley) or pasta; 30 grams cold cereal; ¾ cup hot cereal (e.g. oatmeal) | Average calories per serving |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Cooked oats (oatmeal), English muffin (½ muffin) | 60-80 |
| Bread | 70-110 |
| Pita (small) , chapati, air-popped popcorn (no topping, 3 cups) | 80-100 |
| Rice, quinoa, barley, pasta, bagel, tortilla (small) | 100-120 |
| Cereal | varies considerably, check food label |

Sources used:

Netzer, C. (1997), The Complete Book of Food Counts

Pennington, J. (1998), Food Values of Portions Commonly Used

Food Data Central from the US Department of Agriculture, <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/index.html>

Nutrition labels on foods in supermarkets

3. Problem solve

So you have set a SMART nutrition goal (Step 1) and you are monitoring your goal everyday using the nutrition monitoring sheet (Step 2) to determine if you have achieved your goal: What's next?

If you have achieved your nutrition goal...GREAT! Note what you did to stay on track and keep doing it.

If you haven't achieved your nutrition goal then you need to reflect on why this happened and identify what you can do to get back on track. Problem solving is especially useful if you have set a nutrition goal as part of your approach to weight loss.

The first thing to do in this step is to answer the question "Why did I not achieve my nutrition goal today?" Possible reasons include:

- I was very hungry and didn't pay attention and ended up eating more than I had planned.
- I was sad/angry/depressed/stressed and eating my favorite foods felt good
- I went to an all-you-can-eat buffet with friends and everything looked so good so I piled my plate with food and even went back for more
- I felt deprived
- I was too tired to prepare food so I opted for fast food instead

Write down the reason on the problem solving sheet below.

Once you know the reason, then you can problem solve to prevent this barrier from interfering with achieving your nutrition goal in the future.

Problem-solving strategies can be placed into 2 categories:

- practical strategies
- cognitive strategies

Practical Strategies

The practical approach to problem-solving is to change what you are doing. An example of practical problem-solving strategies to overcome the barrier of getting so hungry that you don't pay attention to what you eat is to eat regularly throughout the day and to not go for long periods of time without eating so you don't get so hungry in the first place.

Cognitive Strategies

The cognitive approach to problem-solving is to change how you think.

Our behaviour in a situation (i.e. the things we do) is determined by our thoughts related to that situation. In order to adopt health-enhancing behaviours, we need to adopt positive thoughts about that behaviour.

Our thoughts determine our emotions, which in turn determine our behaviours.

The cognitive approach helps you identify sabotaging thinking and effectively respond to it, so you feel better and can behave in helpful ways.

You can't stop sabotaging thoughts from arising, but you can respond to them.

For example, rather than tell yourself "I am hungry and need to eat right now!" tell yourself "I am starting to feel hungry. I will have something to eat soon but I can wait a bit".

Problem Solving Workspace

The reason I did not achieve my nutrition goal today is:

How I can overcome this barrier to eating healthfully and get back on track with my nutrition goal:

Practical problem-solving strategies

| What can I do differently next time I encounter this barrier? | Notes |
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Cognitive problem-solving strategies

(see below for ideas)

| What thoughts did I have that prevented me from sticking with my goal? | What are alternative thoughts I can adopt in this situation that would help me stay on track with my nutrition goal? |
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Below are examples of unhelpful thoughts that can interfere with achieving your daily nutrition goal and alternative, helpful thoughts that are more likely to keep you on track. These ideas were presented in the book "[The Beck Diet Solution](#)" by Judith Beck. The [Beck Diet Program](#) website offers additional ideas and tools.

| Unhelpful ("sabotaging") thought | Helpful, alternative thought |
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| "temptation", "I can't resist", "I have no control" | |
| "This food is not on my nutrition plan...but I really feel like having it." | "I have made a plan and I will follow it: no ifs, and, or but. I have a choice and my choice is to follow my plan." |
| "I can't control myself. I have to eat this." "I can't resist this food." | It's not that I can't control myself; it's that I don't want to control myself right at this moment. This craving is strong, but there are lots of things I can do to counteract it. I'll be glad if I do." |
| "I don't care", "It doesn't matter" | |
| "I know that this is not on my nutrition plan, but I don't care. I'm going to have it anyway." | "Yes I do care! Otherwise, I wouldn't have committed myself to this nutrition plan. I know that there will be "bumps in the road" and this is one of them. I need to learn how to deal with these feelings and giving in to them will only undermine my confidence." |
| "Oh, just eat it. It won't matter" | "Yes it does matter. I want to be at a healthy weight. When I eat something that takes me over my nutrition goal for the day, it makes it more likely that I will give in again in the future. If I eat this, I'll get a few seconds of pleasure, but then I'll feel bad. I can resist this. I want to achieve and maintain a healthy weight much more than I want a few seconds of pleasure." |
| Giving yourself permission to eat | |
| I know I shouldn't eat this, but it's OK because: - I had a hard day - This is a celebration - It will just go to waste - I really want it - It won't matter | "No it is not OK if I eat this. I have committed to a nutrition plan to help me achieve my weight goal. Giving myself permission to eat food that is not on the plan will detract from achieving my goal". |
| "I deserve to be able to eat what I want, when I want" | "If I want all the benefits of being at a healthy weight, I just can't eat what I want without planning. I have to make 'I deserve to be at a healthy weight and feel good about myself' a much higher priority than 'I deserve to make spontaneous choices about what I eat'". |
| Emotions | |
| "I'm upset. I have to eat." | "There are other ways to cope with my feelings that are effective and don't include food. The food doesn't fix the problem that caused the bad feelings in the first place. The taste of the food in my mouth might feel good, but that feeling is temporary, lasting a few short minutes at most. I will probably feel bad about not sticking to my plan if I eat. I will feel good about myself if I stick with the plan." |

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| <p>"I can't calm down without eating"</p> | <p>"There are plenty of techniques I can use to deal with my emotions instead of turning to food. I'll be very glad in a little while that I didn't compound the original problem by eating."</p> |
| <p>"I deserve to eat when I'm feeling bad"</p> | <p>"I deserve to feel better. I deserve comfort. But I also deserve to be at a healthy weight. Comforting myself with food will only work temporarily, and I'll feel even worse later."</p> |
| <p>Overeating and getting back on track</p> | |
| <p>"I can't believe I let myself eat this! I've really blown it...I might as well eat whatever I want for the rest of the day and start following my nutrition plan again tomorrow."</p> | <p>"It's not the end of the world. I can start following my plan again right this minute. Just because I made a mistake doesn't mean I should keep on eating without paying attention. That makes no sense. It's so much better to continue with the plan right now than to give up for the day."</p> |
| <p>"It's so terrible that I ate that. I am so weak. I'm just not going to be able to achieve a healthy weight."</p> | <p>"OK, I made a mistake. I shouldn't have eaten that, but I can start eating in a better way right now."</p> |
| <p>Following nutrition plan is hard or too much work. I can't do it.</p> | |
| <p>"Monitoring my nutrition is too much work."</p> | <p>"How much effort is it really? What is the big deal anyway? If monitoring helps me get where I want to be, then I will do it."</p> |
| <p>"This is too hard. I can't do it. I'll never be able to stop myself eating like this. I may as well give up."</p> | <p>"Okay, so I made a mistake. This was inevitable. It's unreasonable to expect myself to be perfect every single time. I'm not a failure. I can learn something from this experience to help me the next time."</p> |
| <p>"I don't want to accept the things that I have to do. Eating healthfully should be easier."</p> | <p>"I have a choice: I can struggle with what I have to do and feel bad, or I can accept that this is the way it is. It doesn't mean that I have to like it. There are many things I don't like in my life. I don't particularly like paying bills. I definitely don't like getting up as early as I do for school/work. I don't like d. But I accept doing laundry. I don't struggle with these tasks, so they don't cause me much discomfort."</p> <p>"Sticking to my nutrition plan is not difficult most of the time. I need to be a bit more vigilant"</p> |
| <p>"It's too much trouble to keep doing all these things."</p> | <p>"Achieving a healthy weight is very important to me. It does take effort to do these things, but the payoff is tremendous."</p> |
| <p>Feeling like a "failure"</p> | |
| <p>"I'm such a failure. I'll never achieve a healthy weight."</p> | <p>"I have a lot of strengths and skills that I have used to achieve many things in my life. I can apply them to this situation and succeed as well. Achieving a healthy weight isn't easy but I have the tools and I will use them. I have lost weight in the past, so it is clear that I can do this".</p> |

| Hunger | |
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| “When I feel the urge to eat, I should eat.” | “Having the urge to eat does not necessarily mean that I need to eat. I ate just a short while ago. I’m not going to have this.” |
| Dwell on feeling of hunger. Become preoccupied with food. Overestimate how strong your hunger is or how long it will last. See hunger as an emergency. | Hunger is not an emergency. I’m just feeling hungry/I’m just having a craving. I can shift my attention to something else. I don’t have to eat impulsively to get rid of this feeling.” |
| This plan won’t work for me | |
| “Setting goals, monitoring and the other strategies in this nutrition plan won’t work for me.” | “I don’t know that this won’t work because I haven’t tried it and given it my all. In the past, I didn’t use these tools and I didn’t lose weight. What do I have to lose?” |
| Liking the feeling of fullness | |
| “I like feeling of being full. If I don’t feel full it’s like I haven’t eaten at all. I don’t feel satisfied” | “I don’t need to feel “full” to be satisfied. I feel satisfied when I stick to the plan”. |
| Not seeing weight loss, weight loss is “small”, gained weight | |
| After seeing the scale go up one week you say: “This is terrible. This is never going to work. I may as well give up now.” | “OK. No big deal. I should just keep on doing what I’ve been doing and the scale will probably go down next week---and if it doesn’t then I will use my problem solving skills to address the weight gain.” |
| “I didn’t lose enough weight.” | “My weight is going down. That’s good. It means that what I have been doing is working. I should celebrate each ½ pound weight loss.” |
| I didn’t lose any weight this week and I stuck to my nutrition plan. I can’t believe this. See, I just can’t lose weight! | “My weight might be up temporarily for hormonal or other reasons. If my weight doesn’t go down next week I will review my goals. Perhaps I need to adjust my nutrition goal or increase my level of physical activity. I just need to stay problem-focused.” |
| Not wanting to monitor | |
| “I don’t have to write down what I am eating. I can remember without writing it down.” | “I should really carry out every task in the plan so I’ll have the greatest chance of success.” |
| “I don’t want to write anything down” | “Which is stronger? Wanting to be at a healthy weight or not wanting to be inconvenienced? Since I very much want to achieve a healthy weight, then I will begin writing everything down.” |
| “Writing things down won’t get me to a healthy weight” | “If my weight loss approach consisted only of writing things down, it wouldn’t work. I won’t know if I’ll be successful until I try it. I may as well do everything in my power that I can because I really want to be at a healthy weight.” |
| Fairness | |
| “It’s not fair that I can’t eat this/eat what I want when I want.” | “Of course I don’t like this. However, I am going to accept it and move on.” |

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| | <p>“Sticking to this nutrition plan may not be fair, but I have 2 choices: I can feel sorry for myself, stop following my plan, never reach my goal, and continue to be disappointed with myself. Or I can sympathize with myself but go ahead and do what I know I need to do. Everyone experiences some kind of unfairness in life. This is one of mine. Besides, the greatest unfairness to me would be if I let this excuse prevent me from reaching this goal, which is important for me.”</p> |
| <p>Food pushers</p> | |
| <p>"Have a little piece of this apple pie. It is your favourite" says your mom. "Have some of my Black Forest cake?" says your friend. You think: "If I don't eat this food, my mom/friend will be upset or insulted." and you have a big piece</p> | <p>"I don't want to make people upset; but that doesn't mean that I have to eat the entire piece. I can have a taste and tell them that I am paying attention to my diet so I won't eat the whole piece". I don't have to please them or to justify myself. I don't want to let their reaction (or my prediction of their reaction) get in the way of achieving my nutrition goal".</p> |
| <p>Special occasions</p> | |
| <p>"This is a special occasion and I deserve to treat myself."</p> | <p>If I want to achieve and maintain a healthy weight, I have to learn to celebrate in different ways. If I keep celebrating with food, I'll put myself at risk for gaining weight. It isn't worth it."</p> |