

Food Diaries can help in Weight Loss

Have you tried to lose weight all year, but finding challenges in sticking to a healthy diet. If so, consider keeping a food diary. Research has shown that overweight people who kept food diaries lost twice as much weight compared to those who did not keep food diaries.

A food diary can be an important tool in helping you become aware of your eating patterns and understand your eating habits and triggers for over eating. It is also a visual to show you where you can improve and can inspire you to do better. Also, tracking your food intake keeps you accountable for what you put into your mouth. Often we don't realize how many calories we consume when we take just a bite of cake or eat a few pieces of candy. However, those bites, tastes and lick add up! When you keep a food diary and track everything you consume, you will be less likely to eat those bites and nibbles.

A food diary can be as simple as using a pen and notebook or can be more high tech. You can record your food diary on your computer or use a website app. One example of a free website you can check out is ChooseMyPlate.gov. Go to online tools, and then click on "SuperTracker." This online tool can help you track the foods you eat. Also note that many resources as ChoosMyPlate.gov for living healthier include tips for increasing physical activity, recipes and menus. Another good food tracker is My Fitness Pal. You can download the app to your phone and have it easy to track.

Once you have determined which method is be for you, record the food, the amount eaten and the calories consumed every time you eat something. Other notes you may want to include in your food diary are:

- Time of day
- Time spent eating
- Place where eating took place
- Any other activities done while eating.
- Your mood at the time you were eating
- If you were eating alone or eating with others.
- The level of hunger at the time.

It is best to record the food in your diary immediately after you have eaten, rather than waiting until the end of the day. Your log will be more accurate if you do track throughout the day because you won't forget what you ate. Also, keep your diary in a noticeable place such as on the kitchen counter, so you will be reminded to write down the food and beverages that you consumed.

Be accurate in your estimation of portion sizes you consume. At first, you may need to measure what you are eating. Don't assume you are having one cup of cereal for breakfast. Actually measure it to see how much you are pouring into your bowl. You may be surprised. People often eat much more than they realize.

After you have kept your food diary for couple of weeks, review to get a realistic picture of your current eating habits. Recognizing eating triggers is an important first step in getting control of them For instance, your diary may show that you are eating is triggered by boredom rather than hunger. That's a signal to develop other ways to relieve boredom. If extreme hunger is the trigger, smaller, more frequent meals and light, high-fiber snacks might be the answer.

Keeping a food diary requires a little discipline, but it is worth the time and effort. Those who do keep one regularly are more successful in changing their lifestyle and losing weight.

Source: Penn State Extension