

Six a day, six days a week

Need a basic but realistic recipe for a balanced diet? Go for six 'airplane-sized' meals a day, six days a week (no, not the size of an actual airplane...but the size of the meals they serve you on board).

When trying to manage weight, many people make the mistake of eating less frequently – but all this does is make your brain think you are starving, so it slows your metabolism and helps you to hoard as much fat as possible to deal with the famine. Very handy when we were reliant on daily hunting and gathering for our nutrition, but not so great if you're trying to shed a few excess kilos.

Your metabolism burns the fuel (food) in your body according to how much energy you are expending and how much food it is used to receiving: not much energy or not much food and it will slow down to conserve your reserves, but keep your body supplied with a constant and reliable intake of good foods and your metabolism, like a well-stoked fire, will keep burning fast using up higher levels of energy on an ongoing basis. That means you'll burn more energy and lose more weight.

So the message is: to lose weight you may need to eat more of the right foods, more often. That's got to be the best news you've had all day!

So, how much is enough? Have you ever wondered how much your stomach holds? The stomach of an average weight adult can hold about three cups of food before feeling uncomfortably full. The stomach of an overweight person can hold four cups or more before getting the same feeling. Your stomach stretches and expands, so if you're used to eating large meals, it will stretch more than if you're used to eating small meals. But remember it's not what you do 10 per cent of the time that matters; it's what you do 90 per cent of the time that counts. So overeating at the occasional buffet dinner won't expand your stomach but overeating regularly can. The good news is that when you return to smaller meals your stomach gets used to that style of eating and returns to a regular size.

The ideal size meal you're looking for is about the size of those neat little portions they serve on airplanes. Or in other words, roughly the size of the palm of your hand. At every meal you need one palm-sized portion of either protein or carbohydrate and one palm-sized portion of fruits or vegetables. And if you're still hungry, add more vegetables or fruits.

People often ask me how to identify which foods are proteins and which are carbohydrates. A basic rule of thumb is if it comes from an animal or legume then it's a protein, for example red and white meats, fish, dairy and soy products. And if it comes out of the ground then it's a carbohydrate, for example whole grains (such as used in bread, rice and pasta), potatoes and so on. And the rest of the whole foods are fruits and vegetables.

When it comes to getting your head around eating six meals a day people generally get stuck on how to fit in the extra three. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are hard enough sometimes, so how do we fit in those plus three more? The easy way to handle this is to carry healthy snacks around with you during the day. This helps you to avoid overeating at meals or being stuck and having to grab takeaway (which usually ends up being a bad food choice). When I'm on the run I make up my extra meals with snacks like a handful of almonds, nuts, seeds, sultanas or raisins, or a bag of vegetable sticks and something fun to dip them into. I like nuts and seeds because they are loaded with protein and good fat.

The seventh day

The easiest way that I've found for myself and my clients to stick to a healthy eating plan is to eat healthily six days a week and enjoy a 'free day' on the seventh. On free days you can indulge in any treats you want, guilt free.

Being only human, if someone tells us that we cannot have our favorite foods (like chocolate) ever again, we are going to crave them in the biggest way. So I say you can have your chocolate, but go for quality over

quantity. Buy your absolute favourite chocolate, but only have it once a week. This way you can get your head around your cravings, you'll have more chance of staying on track and you'll benefit from the added bonus of finding that your favourite food tastes that much better when you do have it.

This 'free day' break in the routine is a treat to look forward to and also signals your body to not go into starvation mode. So enjoy your free day, it's a necessary part of balanced nutrition.

Copyright © 2014 Jennifer Jefferies

All rights reserved | Contact Jennifer - 1300 630 511 or enquiries@jenniferjefferies.com