

Smart Swaps

With a few savvy switches, you can trim your daily calories without feeling deprived

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Let's face it, from time to time we all try to shed some weight, drop a few pounds, lose a couple of inches. But nothing's worse than cutting and counting calories, not to mention following one of those dreaded diets that force you to give up the goodies you love for grapefruit or carrot sticks three times a day.

Turns out, it's not as hard to cut calories as most believe. Gina Sunderland, a registered dietitian based in Winnipeg, says that trimming just 10% of your daily caloric intake has the potential to do "amazing things" for your health — such as reducing your weight and blood cholesterol and decreasing your blood sugar. That means, if you usually consume about 2,500 calories daily, all you have to do is shave off 250 calories a day, or a handful off of each meal. You can do this by making a few simple swaps. Add in just half an hour of exercise and you're guaranteed to get healthier and trimmer.

Here's how to pare down as you chow down. As for deprivation, not a bit of it — you won't even notice you're cutting calories.

BREAKFAST: DON'T SKIP IT

According to Victoria-based registered dietitian Danielle Van Schaick, "eating breakfast kick-starts your metabolism first thing in the morning, which helps you lose weight. Skipping it, or any other meal, will slow it down." Basically, missing meals forces your body to go into a sort of calorie-conserving starvation mode; plus, you'll likely end up overeating later in the day.

Based on a target of 2,000 calories per day, aim to consume 350 to 400 calories at breakfast. Instead of a cup of 2% milk, have a cup of skim and save 39 calories. At work, swap your mid-morning tall latte for a tall skim latte and save 50 calories. A homemade breakfast sandwich with one egg, one slice of bacon and a slice of tomato on an English muffin saves 210 calories over the sausage-cheese-egg version at a fast-food joint.

While you're at it, be wary of chugging back a big glass of fruit juice. This is higher in calories than a piece of whole fruit, which will also give you valuable dietary fibre. Shun sugary cereals, pastries, muffins and waffles. Even a bran muffin can contain more than 10 grams of fat.

"Yogourts, too, can be high in sugar and fat," says Van Schaick. "Look for ones with fewer than 20 grams of sugar per serving and a fat content of 0% (fat-free), 1% or 2%."

LUNCH: PACK IT

Brown bagging can save you hundreds of calories — not to mention dollars. (How many times have you waited in a lineup at a fast-food joint, peeling off \$7 for unposh nosh?) A good energy target at lunchtime is 500 to 600 calories. Avoid takeout stir-fries, noodle dishes, restaurant salads, pizza and vending-machine items, says Van Schaick. If you're bringing sandwiches from home, one tablespoon of Miracle Whip dressing instead of mayonnaise saves 55 calories; one tablespoon of mustard instead of mayo saves 87 calories; and a slice of 2% reduced-fat cheddar cheese instead of regular cheddar saves 30 calories. If you have to buy lunch, ordering from the local sushi restaurant instead of a burger or chicken outlet can save you 400 to 800 calories.

DINNER: CHECK PORTIONS

"Canadians like the look of a full plate, which generally means a lot of unwanted calories," says Sunderland. By switching from dinner plates to lunch-sized plates you can effortlessly cut up to 500 calories a meal. While you're at it, load at least half of your plate with veggies and you'll save even more. For example, if you have a palm-sized serving of steak, a salad with balsamic-vinegar dressing and a plain baked potato instead of a whole T-bone steak, a salad with creamy dressing and fat-lashed roasted or mashed potatoes, you'll save about 300 calories. Choose the leanest cuts of red meat such as beef round roast, and opt for lower-fat poultry options such as chicken or turkey breast. All of these will help satisfy your protein cravings, and they'll deliver fewer calories and less fat.

SNACK TIME: BE PREPARED

If you know you're going to crave sugary or salty snacks after dinner, plan for better choices. Have a piece of fruit instead of a granola bar and save 50 to 100 calories. Three cups of popcorn instead of three cups of chips saves 350 calories. Hummus and fresh veggies instead of chips and dip will save about 250 calories.

For additional savvy switches, go to www.obesitynetwork.ca, www.capitalhealth.ca and www.dietitians.ca. 

Substitutes please!

Be a calorie-cutting champ

USUAL

SWAP

AVERAGE CALORIES SAVED

BREAKFAST

- 1 cup orange juice
- 1 bagel with regular cream cheese
- 1 medium banana
- 1 grande caramel Frappuccino
- 1 piece French toast with 2% milk and whole egg

40
200
80
250
100

- 1 medium orange
- 1 English muffin with light cream cheese
- 3 1/2 oz fresh strawberries
- 1 grande skim latte
- 1 piece French toast with skim milk and egg white

BREAKFAST

LUNCH

- 1 cup orange juice
- 2 tbsp peanut butter on bread
- 1 oz regular cheddar cheese on sandwich

55
120
70

- 1/2 cup orange juice diluted with 1/2 cup water
- 2 tbsp hummus on bread
- 1 oz avocado on sandwich

LUNCH

DINNER

- 1 4-oz serving red meat
- 1 1/2 cups pasta
- 1 beef burger
- 1 cup cream soup

100
110
200
200

- 1 4-oz serving fish
- 1 cup pasta
- 1 chicken-breast burger
- 1 cup broth-based soup

DINNER

SNACKS

- 1/3 cup nuts
- 1 bowl ice cream
- 15 potato chips

100
175
120

- 1/3 cup soy nuts
- 1 Popsicle
- 15 rice chips

SNACKS

POTENTIAL CALORIES SAVED
1,920!