

Diet Checklist

By Lauren Meir

Do...

- Hydrate!** Drink plenty of water before, during, and in between meals.
- Keep it fresh** Enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the day.
- Eat lean protein** such as skinless chicken breast, turkey, fish (such as salmon and tilapia), lean beef (like flank steak) and lean pork loin ..and don't forget nature's perfect protein... eggs! Protein portions for each meal should be about 3-4 oz., about the size of ;your palm.
- Eat lowfat dairy** like plain ;Greek ;yogurt and drink low-fat cow's milk- These calcium-rich foods are also high in protein. Have a problem with lactose? Try goat or soy milk.
- Eat whole grains**, such as brown rice, barley, quinoa and bulghur Pick wheat or whole grain bread over white.
- Remember healthy fats** Unsalted nuts (almonds and walnuts are best), avocados, and olive oil are great examples.
- Eat a combination of fresh produce, whole grains, lean protein and healthy fats at every meal.**
- Eat several small meals a day, every 3 hours or so** This will keep your metabolism fired up and you'll always feel satisfied.
- Have a light meal about 3 hours before bed** Lowfat dairy products and some whole grains are a good mix and may help you sleep better.
- Bake, steam, or simmer your food.**
- Experiment with herbs and spices** They can make your dishes more flavorful without the extra sugar and preservatives found in bottled sauces.
- Eat your oatmeal!** ;Oatmeal is filling, delicious, and good for you Make yours with milk or plain yogurt, and top with bananas, ;cinnamon ;or berries for sweetness. Just be sure to get the regular stuff (not quick-cooking or instant). It only takes about 10 minutes to make, and is the perfect breakfast.

Don't...

- Skip meals or starve yourself** Besides damaging your health, ;this tactic actually slows your metabolism down and your body will stop burning fat.
- Eat too few calories, especially if you're active** You'll be more susceptible to injury and infection.
- Go to bed hungry** Chances are you won't sleep well, and may overeat the next morning.
- Skip breakfast** It is the most important meal of the day, and will get your metabolism moving while keeping blood sugar regulated. If you aren't a breakfast eater, start small: have some fresh fruit with yogurt.
- Completely cut out a food group (such as carbs)** You may lose weight at first, but once you re-introduce this group to your diet you will most likely gain back even more weight.

Avoid...

- Using Margarine and hydrogenated oil** Use olive oil whenever possible. Canola, coconut (yes, coconut!) and avocado oil are also good substitutes, but since the fat content is higher use moderately.
- Eating pre-packaged foods, they're chock-full of harmful preservatives, and/or synthetic ingredients.** Make your own snacks!
- Eating refined foods, like those containing white flour and sugar.**
- High fructose corn syrup at all costs!** This, like sugar, is harmful and found in a surprising array of food products, like ketchup.
- Using salt, cream sauces, and pre-bottled marinades.** (Try subbing lemon juice for salt when cooking!)
- Alcohol, as it is usually empty calories with lots of added sugar** If you need a drink occasionally, opt for a glass of red wine. Red wine has some heart-healthy properties.
- Fatty meats such as full-fat beef, bacon, ;pepperoni ;and salami.**
- Deep frying, stir-frying, and ;sauteing** These cooking methods require the use of excessive oil, and much of the nutritional value of your food will be lost.
- Hard yellow cheeses and cream cheese** All fat, no nutrients! Try lowfat ;mozzarella ;instead. If you miss the cream cheese, try ;Greek ;yogurt. It has a similar ;consistency ;to whipped cream cheese, and is high in protein, low in fat, high in taste! (Much better than fat-free cream cheese!)

Try...

- Eating an apple before meals** This will fill you up, as both the water and fiber content of apples are high.
- Using stevia sweetener instead of sugar** It's the only known calorie-free sugar substitute that is not harmful to your health, and is safe for people with diabetes.
- Cutting back on ;caffeine, especially in soft drinks or fatty lattes** Green tea is full of antioxidants and will keep you (safely!) alert. Best of all, you can drink several cups a day.
- Craving something sweet? Have some fresh fruit, top greek yogurt with berries or sample some dark chocolate.**
- Substituting to make your ;recipes ;healthier** For baked goods, you can often substitute unsweetened applesauce for oil, plain white lowfat yogurt for buttermilk, and 2 ;egg whites ;for one whole egg.
- Adding some spice!** Spicy jalapeno peppers, dried crushed chillis, and hot paprika add a kick to your foods and may fire up metabolism.
- Foods you may not be familiar with, but should definitely try** Quinoa, for example, is a grain similar in texture to barley you can substitute for other starches, with the added benefit that it's a complete protein! Try Soy, Almond, rice, and Spelt milks as substitutes for dairy.