



Are you dieting and not losing weight? More than likely, some common diet mistakes are tripping you up.

6 REASONS YOU'RE NOT LOSING WEIGHT

THE TRUTH, EXPERTS SAY, IS THAT EVEN WHEN YOU'RE "on a diet," you may be eating a lot more calories than you think. There's often a disconnect between what we know we should do to lose weight, and what we actually do while trying to diet.

For starters, stop thinking about dieting. Instead, take a look at those everyday habits that could be causing weight gain. Going on a diet can create an obsession with food, heighten cravings, and lead to a "throw-in-the-towel-because-diets-don't-work" mentality.

You might not realize just how quickly calories can add up. An extra tablespoon of salad dressing can add 75-100 calories, an extra tablespoon of butter adds 102 calories, and that 1-ounce bag of chips with your sandwich at lunch adds 162 calories. Eating while cooking, starting each day with a high-calorie coffee drink, finishing off the kids' plates at dinner, or having one too many glasses of wine -- these are just a few of the sneaky habits that sabotage weight loss efforts.

Yet as quickly as calories can add up, they can be subtracted. Becoming mindful of your diet mistakes -- the subtle ways that calories sneak into your diet throughout the day -- can add up to real weight loss. Check out our list of common diet mistakes people make, and see if any sound familiar to you.

Diet Mistake No. 1: RACING TO THE FINISH

There's no reward for finishing your meal in record time -- unless you're a contestant in a hot dog eating contest! Our hectic schedules have led many of us to adopt the unhealthy habit of rapid eating.

"We need to adopt more of the leisurely, European-style eating so that we can savor our food, taste every bite, and get the signal of fullness before over-eating," says Tara Gidus, MS, RD, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association.

Diet Mistake No. 2: SKIPPING MEALS

Research shows that breakfast skippers weigh more than breakfast eaters. There is a misconception that skipping breakfast -- or any meal -- saves calories. The truth is that most people who eat fewer than three meals usually end up eating more calories during the course of the day.

Strive for three meals a day. Always start your day with a healthy breakfast, but be careful to choose wisely.

"Even a low-fat muffin can have as many as 400 calories and 5 grams fat," says Joanne Lichten, PhD, RD, a nutrition consultant and the author of *Dining Lean*.

A healthy breakfast should contain both protein and fiber. An egg, a piece of whole-wheat toast, and half a grapefruit has only 250 calories and will keep you feeling full until lunch.

Diet Mistake No. 3: TOO MANY LIQUID CALORIES

Liquid calories from alcohol, smoothies, coffee with cream and sugar, sweetened juices, teas, and sodas can really contribute to weight gain. One recent study found that Americans get approximately 21% of their calories from beverages.

"When you drink beverages, you don't tend to compensate by eating less because most beverages satisfy thirst and don't impact hunger," says Gidus.

Switch from calorie-laden beverages to water, club soda, skim milk, vegetable juices, and small portions of 100% fruit juice. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation, and choose lighter drink options.

HERE ARE SOME CALORIE COUNTS FOR COMMON BEVERAGES:

- 12-ounce light beer: 110 calories
- 12-ounce regular beer: 160 calories
- 8-ounce coffee with cream & sugar: 30 cal
- 5 ounces of wine: 120-130 calories
- 6-ounce wine spritzer: 80 calories
- 16-ounce sweetened tea: 160 calories
- 12-ounce diet soda: 0 calories
- 12-ounce soda: 150 calories
- 20-ounce smoothie: 410 calories

Diet Mistake No. 4: OVERSIZED PORTIONS

"We have gotten used to huge portions at restaurants so when we are at home, we serve up the same size and think it is normal," says Lichten.

Experts suggest a few tricks to help you trim your portions:

- Leave a few bites on your plate.
- Use smaller plates and bowls.
- Periodically check your portions with measuring cups.

“Could we change our attitude, we should not only see life differently, but life itself would come to be different.”

Katherine Mansfield

Diet Mistake No. 5: CHOOSING UNHEALTHY ADD-ONS

Not only have portions crept up in size, we also have a tendency to top off our "diet" salads and other favorite foods with high-fat toppings, like bacon, cheese, croutons, and creamy dressings.

And, at fast-food restaurants, "grilled chicken and salads are not always better than a burger," notes Lichten. "It all depends on the size and the toppings."

For example, the Burger King Tendergrill sandwich with honey mustard dressing has 450 calories while their Whopper Jr., with mustard instead of mayo, has only 290 calories. At McDonald's, the Caesar salad with crispy chicken and creamy dressing totals 490 calories, while a Quarter Pounder weighs in at 410 calories.

Diet Mistake No. 6: MINDLESS EATING

"Eating amnesia" is the act of unknowingly putting hand to mouth, usually from a bag or box in front of the television, while reading a book. It can also happen at happy hour, or when you finish the last few bites on your child's plate.

"Resist the temptation to clean yours or anyone else's plate," says Gidus. "Think about your waistline instead of the food waste."

Consider the calories in small portions of some of our favorite snacks, and see how quickly they can add up when portions are multiplied:

- 1 Twinkie: 150 calories
- 12 peanut M&Ms: 125 calories
- 1 ounce of French fries: 88 calories
- 1.5 donut holes: 100 calories
- 3 Hershey kisses: 75 calories
- 3 Oreo cookies: 160 calories
- 15 tortilla chips: 142 calories
- 20 potato chips: 162 calories

AND HOW CAN YOU KICK THE MINDLESS EATING HABIT?

"First, try to get out of the habit of always eating something while you are sitting and relaxing," says Gidus. "Try a cup of tea, glass of water, or chew a piece of sugarless gum. If you want a snack, portion it out of the bag or container."

SOURCES: Joanne Lichten, PhD, RD, author, *Dining Lean*. Tara Gidus, MS, RD, spokeswoman, American Dietetic Association; nutrition consultant, Tampa, Fla.