

## The How and Why of Food Tracking



“What gets measured gets managed.” – Peter Drucker

If you want to improve something, you need to track your progress. Tracking allows you to see exactly how much each choice brings you closer to (or further away from!) your goals. Sometimes you will be surprised at how much or how little you have eaten. And if you think to yourself, “I’ll just indulge a little” then log it; you will might find out your “little splurge” cost you 750 calories! To burn this off, it would require a whopping 90 minutes of brutally intense exercise to burn that off! Now you can pause before that decision and ask yourself “Is it really worth it?”

When people record what, when, and how much they eat, and/or their weight — they eat less, and lose weight as the result.

Added bonus: the simply *act* of recording your food intake is actually linked to higher levels of exercise. Meaning, people who track their food tend to work out more as a side effect.

### Tips:

- ✓ Record all of the foods you eat each day.

✓ Add more details over time. Start by tracking overall what and when you eat. If it is working for you, you can track specifically how much you eat to get a handle on your calories and nutrition.

## **How to Track Your Food**

**You can use any of these to measure how much you are eating:**

Measuring cups and spoons

Kitchen scale

Food labels

Calculator

**Ways to record what, when, and how much you eat:**

Spiral notebook

Spreadsheet

Smartphone apps

Voice recording

Take a photo of your food

*Note: an advantage of an app is that it does most of the work for you. Enter a food and an amount, it does the rest!*

## **How to Know Your Serving Sizes**

You can use everyday objects to eyeball serving size. Here are some examples:

2 tablespoons = Ping-pong ball

1 ounce of cheese = 4 dice

4 ounces of meat or poultry = deck of cards

1/4 cup = Golf ball

1/2 cup = Tennis ball

1 cup = Baseball

1 medium baked potato = Computer mouse

1 medium apple = Tennis ball

## Hands and Serving Size

You can also use your hands to estimate serving sizes.

About 4 ounces = palm of your hand

About 1 tablespoon = the size of your thumb

About 1 teaspoon = the end of your thumb

About 1 cup = your fist

1 serving of nuts = about 1/4 cup or small handful

## Make Sense of Food Labels

### Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (228g) ← Always check the serving size and measure portions accordingly

Servings Per Container 2 ← Make sure you know how much you are consuming

Amount Per Serving

**Calories** 250

Calories from Fat 110

**Total Fat** 12g

Saturated Fat 3g

*Trans Fat* 3g ← **BAD NEWS!!!**

**Cholesterol** 30 mg

**Sodium** 470mg

**Total Carbohydrate** 31g

**% Daily Value** 18%

### 3 Limit These Nutrients

<i>Trans Fat</i> 3g
Sugars 6g (especially added)
Sodium 470mg 20%

## 4 Get Enough of These

Dietary Fiber 8g
Vitamin A 4%
Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 20%
Iron 5%

## Make Sense of Food Labels

These numbers refer to the sample label

### 1. Serving Size

Start by looking at the serving size. That's the size of one serving. All the other facts on the label are based on this amount.

Also look at the number of servings in the package. Let's say the package contains two servings. So if you eat the whole package, you'll need to multiply all the other facts on the label by two. Use a calculator if needed.

### 2. Calories

Knowing the calories can help you reach or stay at a healthy weight. The calories are the amount of energy you get from a serving of this food. Many Americans get more calories than they need.

### 3. Get Enough of These Nutrients

Most Americans don't eat enough fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron. Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your health and lower your risk of certain health problems.

For instance, getting enough calcium can help strengthen your bones and teeth. Eating plenty of fiber can help you lose weight and lower your cholesterol.

**Other ways to find out nutrition facts:**

If you don't have a nutrition label on a food, you can always use a phone app or website to give you all the nutrition facts for any particular food. Many restaurants will list the nutritional info of the entire menu on their website.

**How to Cope With Challenges**

It can be challenging to track your food. Here are some common challenges and ways to cope with them. Write your own ideas in the column that says "Other Ways to Cope." Check off each idea you try.

Challenge	Ways to Cope	Other Ways to Cope
<p><b>I'm too busy.</b></p>	<p>Make time to track. It takes just a couple minutes after each meal.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p><b>I have trouble reading and writing.</b></p>	<p>Record your voice with a smartphone or other device.</p> <p>Take a photo of your food.</p> <p>Ask your coach, friends, or family members to help write your food on your Food Log.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

<p><b>I keep forgetting.</b></p>	<p>That is normal at first! This is a new habit that might take time, so don't get discouraged.</p> <p>Make tracking part of your daily routine.</p> <p>Put a reminder on your phone or computer.</p> <p>Set a timer.</p> <p>Leave yourself notes where you'll see them.</p> <p>Ask friends and family to remind you.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>I don't like to track.</b></p>	<p>Share your results with others.</p> <p>Give yourself a small (nonfood) reward for meeting your food goals.</p> <p>Ask a friend or family member to track their food too.</p> <p>Try smartphone and computer apps.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

**Source:** FDA

(<http://www.fda.gov/Food/IngredientsPackagingLabeling/LabelingNutrition/ucm274593.htm#see3>)