

Bend These Weight-Loss Rules

Great news! You can cheat on your diet without suffering the consequences, if you know how.

By Shelley Levitt, Women's Health



If living with your parents taught you anything, it's that the more rules there are, the more you want to break them. And losing weight can seem like nothing but rules. Fortunately, rebellion has its advantages: Disregarding strict food guidelines could be the secret to a successful slim-down. A study published in the *International Journal of Obesity* found that people with a flexible approach to eating—one that allows for sweets and other perceived slip-ups—had a better record of maintaining weight loss than dieters with an "all or nothing" strategy. How can you do it without skidding into a diet danger zone? We got top nutrition pros to confess the supposedly vital weight-loss principles they violate. Employ their secrets to stay satisfied without gaining an ounce.

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The rule: eat five small meals a day

- [Avoid These 5 Common Diet Traps](#) **Who breaks it:** Renee Melton, R.D., director of nutrition services for the mobile weight-loss program Sensei. "My schedule doesn't give me time to prepare healthy snacks, much less eat them, so I make sure I get what I need in three squares a day."
- [30 Healthy Foods That Really Aren't](#) **Why you can, too:** The "graze, don't gorge" philosophy is based on the premise that having frequent small meals keeps your blood sugar steady, your metabolism ramped up, and your appetite in check. But some studies show a link between obesity and eating more than three times a day, most notably in women. More frequent noshing means more opportunities to overeat. Plus, says Melton, having to constantly think about what you're going to eat can be stressful, especially for emotional eaters.
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Do it right: To keep hunger pangs from overriding your willpower throughout the day, eat fiber-rich foods at mealtimes—they make you feel fuller and take longer to digest. Shoot for 21 to 25 grams a day, starting with a high-fiber grain cereal like Kashi's GoLean with low-fat milk and fruit. For lunch and dinner, Melton says, fill half your plate with produce, a quarter with carbs, and the other quarter with lean protein.

The rule: avoid white bread, rice and pasta

Who breaks it: Christine Avanti, clinical sports nutritionist and author of *Skinny Chicks Don't Eat Salads*. She was raised on homemade "white" pasta by her Italian immigrant grandparents.

Why you can, too: Carb lovers have long been warned against highly processed products because they're believed to cause a blood sugar spike. But research published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* found that people on high-carb diets were slimmer than their pastaphobic counterparts even when they threw "bad" carbs like white bread into the mix of fiber-rich whole grains.

Trick or treat? Steer clear of these [20 worst foods in your supermarket](#).

Do it right: Follow the U. S. Department of Agriculture recommendation of six ounces of carbs each day, and make sure

at least half come from whole grains. Then measure out a serving of refined carbs, such as a cup of cooked white pasta, and dig in guilt-free. If a single cup isn't gonna do it for you, pair your pasta with filling protein, like a meaty red sauce made with extra-lean ground turkey.

The rule: don't eat late at night

Who breaks it: Ann G. Kulze, M.D., author of *Dr. Ann's 10-Step Diet: A Simple Plan for Permanent Weight Loss and Lifelong Vitality*. She sits down to dinner every night at 9 p.m. or later.

Why you can, too: "A calorie consumed at 9 p.m. isn't handled any differently by your body than one consumed at 9 a.m.," Kulze says. It's less about when you eat than how much you eat. A study published in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that obese women were more likely than svelte women to eat meals late at night, but they were also more likely to eat more, period. And a study by the USDA showed that your metabolism hums along at the same rate no matter how you time your meals. And delaying dinner does have one undisputed advantage: It helps eliminate late-night snacking, one of the worst diet busters.

Do it right: One reason you're likely to stuff yourself late at night is that you're ravenous from not having eaten since lunchtime. A healthy snack in the late afternoon (around four if you're planning to eat at nine) can help you avoid this pitfall. Studies have found that the fat in nuts is particularly satisfying, so grab a 100-calorie pack of almonds when you're on the go. When you finally find the time for dinner, actually sit at a table, and nix the distractions. Scarfing a meal in the car or in front of the TV means you usually aren't paying attention to what—or how much—you're eating.

Boost your energy and even lose weight with [these satisfying snack ideas](#).

The rule: skip dessert

Who breaks it: Judith S. Stern, Sc.D., a professor of nutrition and internal medicine at the University of California, Davis. She has a "few bites of something decadent" when she dines out.

Why you can, too: We all discover a little more room beneath our waistbands when the dessert tray rolls by. Studies show that when you're offered a variety of foods, you never achieve what's known as taste-specific satiety; your appetite is stimulated anew as each novel flavor is introduced. Outsmart your taste buds by planning ahead. Stern's trick: She looks at the dessert menu along with the main menu, and if she decides to end the meal with, say, a dark-chocolate tart, she'll always choose a salad dressed in a little olive oil and vinegar to start and then have an appetizer as her entree.

Do it right: Desserts are unsurprisingly high in calories, and chain restaurants tend to serve enormous portions—an Applebee's chocolate chip cookie sundae has 1,620 calories and 73 grams of saturated fat! Order off the kid's menu or get something to share. Also consider sorbets and chocolate-dipped fruit, which satisfy a sweet tooth for fewer calories. Dining at home? Try the chocolate raspberry parfait Avanti prepares: Top a half cup of fat-free ricotta cheese with a teaspoon of cocoa powder and a quarter cup of fresh or frozen raspberries. "This snack offers just enough sweetness to calm a sugar craving," she says, "and it's packed with filling protein."

Try these [13 other easy strategies](#) to keep off the weight.

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