

**Quick  
AND Dirty  
Tips**

NUTRITION DIVA PRESENTS

# How to WIN at LOSING



**10 DIET MYTHS  
THAT KEEP  
YOU FROM  
SUCCEEDING**

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## **Myth #1: Calories Don't Matter**

Many popular diets are promoted with the claim that as long as you follow certain rules, you can eat as much as you want and still lose weight. Usually, the “rules” involve eliminating certain foods or food groups (such as carbs, or sugar, or meat, or dairy, or wheat) from the diet. The implication—or, in some cases, the overt claim—is that losing weight has nothing to do with how many calories you consume. Instead, the idea is that eating the right foods (and avoiding the wrong ones) somehow fixes your metabolism, regulates your hormones, or otherwise turns your body into a fat-burning machine that stays lean no matter how much you eat.

You can see why this approach is so popular. By far, the biggest drag about trying to lose weight is having to eat less than you might like to. And to be honest, many of these approaches do lead to weight loss. However, there's far less metabolic “magic” than the books and magazine articles would have you believe. It's not that eliminating food allergens or toxins triggers the release of fat stores. It's not that cutting out carbohydrates turns off your fat-storage genes. The biggest factor is this: When people cut back on carbohydrates (or sugar or wheat or processed foods or whatever), they usually end up consuming fewer calories—even when they're not trying to restrict their calorie intake.

For example, a study that tracked a large group of dieters for two years found that people who followed a strict low-carb diet but were otherwise allowed to eat as much as they wanted ended up reducing their calorie intake by about the same amount as people who were consciously restricting their calories.

There are a couple of things going on here. First, when people have a limited variety of foods to choose from, they tend to eat less than they do when presented with a lot of options. Secondly, when people avoid carbohydrates, they generally increase their intake of protein and fat. Because these nutrients are digested more slowly than carbohydrates, meals that are higher in protein and fat tend to keep you satisfied longer than meals that are high in carbohydrates. As a result, people who cut back on carbs often report that they aren't as hungry between meals—and may snack less. We'll come back to this idea in the next chapter. For now, however, my point is simply that weight loss is primarily due to reduced calorie intake, and not to some mystical hormonal or metabolic effects.

## Calories Do Count (But You Don't Have to Count Them)

Successful weight loss requires eating fewer calories—but that doesn't mean that you must slavishly count each one. As the study I mentioned earlier suggests, a few strategic changes to your eating habits can automatically reduce your calorie intake—and still allow you to eat to satisfaction.

### Tip #1: Stop Drinking Your Calories

Sweetened beverages—including soda, sports drinks, vitamin and energy drinks, and fruit juices—contain a lot of calories but don't satisfy your appetite. For example, people tend to eat the same amount whether they accompany their meal with water or with a 400-calorie soda. Cutting out sweetened beverages at mealtime can trim hundreds of calories from your daily intake without making any difference in how satisfied you feel.

### Tip #2: Choose Foods With a High Water Content

Water has no calories, but it takes up a lot of space in your stomach, which creates a feeling of fullness or satiation. Recently, a study found that people who drank two glasses of water before meals got full sooner, ate fewer calories, and lost more weight. You can put the same strategy to work by choosing foods that have a higher water content over those with less water. For example, the only difference between grapes and raisins is that grapes have about 6 times as much water in them. That water makes a big difference in how much they fill you up. You'll feel much more satisfied after eating 100 calories' worth of grapes—which is a small bowlful—than you would after eating 100 calories' worth of raisins, which is only a quarter cup.

Salad vegetables like lettuce, cucumbers, and tomatoes also have a very high water content, as do broth-based soups. If you start your meals with a salad or bowl of soup, you'll probably consume fewer calories at those meals. And if you're looking for a between-meal snack, whole fruit will fill you up for fewer calories than dried fruit.

### Tip #3: Choose Foods That Are High in Fiber

Another way to feel full on fewer calories is to choose foods that are higher in fiber. Like water, fiber adds volume to foods without adding calories, and that extra bulk helps to fill up your stomach. That's especially true when you consume fiber and fluids together, because the fiber soaks up water and gets even fluffier.

Fiber has a couple of other tricks up its sleeve. First, it slows down the speed at which food leaves your stomach, so that feeling of fullness lasts a little bit longer. And then, when the food travels into the small intestine for digestion, fiber stimulates the release of a hormone called cholecystokinin, which sends another signal back to the brain to say, “That’s enough!”

Foods that are high in fiber include dried beans, bran, vegetables, and whole grains. So, for example, a high-fiber cereal will keep you full longer than a bowl of cornflakes. At lunch, a cup of black bean or split pea soup will go further than a cup of cream of mushroom, and so on.

#### Tip #4: Eat More Whole Foods and Fewer Processed Foods

Processed foods (especially fast foods and snacks) tend to be high in calories and low in nutrition. Even worse, they are intentionally formulated, packaged, and marketed in ways that seduce you into eating more than you mean to. One really easy way to reduce unneeded calories and at the same time improve the nutritional quality of your diet is to make more of your own food—using fresh, whole foods as your starting point. Cook some oatmeal for breakfast. Make a tuna sandwich for lunch instead of visiting the food court. Give the pizza delivery guy the night off and roast a chicken for dinner.

#### Tip #5: Eat More Mindfully

No one wants to go hungry, but the fact is that too many of the calories we consume have absolutely nothing to do with hunger. They are calories of opportunity, or boredom, or inertia, or sheer habit. In fact, there’s a growing body of evidence showing that environmental cues—factors such as how much food is on the table or in the package, how much the people around us are eating, and even how big our plates are—may have a much bigger impact on the amounts we eat than physiological hunger.

An experiment involving trick soup bowls proved that your stomach doesn’t tell you when you’re full; your eyes do. The subjects were asked to eat a bowl of soup and then to rate how full they felt. But some of the bowls were secretly refilled from the bottom as diners ate the soup. The people with the bottomless soup bowl ate 73%

more soup but rated their level of satisfaction exactly the same as the others – after all, they'd only had a single bowl of soup!

In addition to making smart food choices like the ones I've just suggested, try to avoid eating mindlessly in front of the TV or computer or in the car. By slowing down and paying more attention to your food—as well as your appetite—you may find that you are eating less but enjoying it more.