How to Eat at College

Habits to Help Your Body Regulate Itself

Set realistic weight expectations. Healthy bodies can come in many shapes and sizes.

Give yourself permission to eat. Learn to eat, not to diet. Trust, rather than fight against, your hunger and appetite. You mustn’t scare yourself into feeling that you’ll have to go without.

Eat slowly. It takes about 20 minutes after you start eating before you feel satisfied. Eating slowly allows your food to “catch up with you” and gives you time to pay attention to your own signals of enjoyment and satisfaction from the meal.

Eat good food (food you enjoy). Food you dislike or only tolerate will not satisfy you even if there is a great deal of it. If you have an unsatisfying meal, you will be back later, rummaging around, looking for something you like to eat.

Eat attentively—Face the Food. The best food in the world will not satisfy you if you don’t pay attention to it while you’re eating.

Set up your surroundings so you have to go to some trouble to eat. Making food too available so you can grab it and eat it hastily will promote eating inattentively and will short circuit your ability to regulate. Making food hard to get forces you to make a deliberate decision to eat.

Eat regularly. Avoid getting over-hungry. Plan eating into your schedule. It’s too hard to be orderly and attentive when you’re starved. Breakfast is a good thing—almost 80 percent of people who maintain a healthy weight eat this meal. Treat snacks like mini-meals and eliminate grazing.

Plan satisfying meals. Remember that all foods fit into a healthy diet. Include something tasty, something chewy. Notice and provide the foods and combinations that make you feel satisfied. Eating three servings of dairy a day and savoring a large salad before your entrée are two ways to promote both good nutritional intake and a healthy weight.

Monitor eating for emotional reasons. Be aware of how you try to take care of your other needs like stress, anxiety, or relationship problems with food. Do a better job of it. Figure out additional ways of taking care of these needs.

Get enough exercise. Your body depends on adequate exercise to help it regulate its food intake. Whether you have a regular exercise routine, walk for relaxation, or fidget during class, mini movements can help keep you fit.
Get adequate sleep. Too little sleep can increase your hunger and make it hard for your brain to know when it’s full, both which can lead to weight gain. Try for eight hours of sleep every night.

Adapted from Ellyn Satter’s handout series *How to Eat*, by Anne K. Blocker, RD/LD, CDE and certified graduate of Ellyn Satter’s Treating the Dieting Casualty intensive workshop.