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The Best Foods to Eat at Every Time of Day



It's not just what you eat, but when you eat that matters. "Our food dictates everything from our mood and energy levels to sleep patterns and cravings," says Marci Anderson, a registered dietitian in Cambridge, MA. So whether you want to feel alert in the morning, blissed-out at lunch or sleepy at night, smart food choices can get you there. You don't have to eat everything that follows in one day; just pick what suits your needs. Keep clicking to find out how to maximize your meals throughout the day.

7 A.M. Goal: Feel full

Are you hungry when your alarm goes off? Good! That's a sign that your metabolism is revved up, says Anderson. And eating, rather than skipping breakfast, is associated with better metabolism and health, she says. Eat within an hour of waking up and aim for a balance of complex carbs, fats and protein, which helps control your appetite throughout the morning, according to research from the University of Missouri-Columbia. Some suggestions: oatmeal topped with peanut butter and berries or whole-wheat toast topped with cheddar and avocado.

9 A.M. Goal: Focus on work

You may be hardwired to expect your morning jolt from coffee, and that's OK. Caffeine and other compounds a day have been shown to be healthy. Java may also perk up your brain. For a similar lift with less caffeine, gulp some green tea. Its antioxidants have been found to promote brain cell production and improve memory and learning, a 2012 Chinese study found. Or for a caffeine-free concentration boost, chew a stick of gum, per one UK study.

READ MORE AT THE JUICE BAR

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[NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.]

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9 A.M. Goal: Focus on work

You may be hardwired to expect your morning jolt from coffee, and three cups a day have been shown to be healthy. Java may also perk up your ability to focus and pay attention, says registered dietitian Lauri Boone, author of *Powerful Plant-Based Superfoods*. For a similar lift with less caffeine, gulp some green tea. Its antioxidants have been found to promote brain cell production and improve memory and learning, a 2012 Chinese study found. Or for a caffeine-free concentration boost, chew a stick of gum, per one UK study.

11 A.M. Goal: Avoid treats at the meeting

Yes, the breakfast on slide 2 keeps you satisfied, but it's normal to feel hungry again after three or four hours. Eating a small snack before a meeting stocked with cookies or doughnuts takes the edge off your hunger, so you

can resist temptation. Anderson recommends a cup of lowfat Greek yogurt because it contains 15 to 20 grams of filling protein to reduce cravings. Then, if a doughnut still looks good, grab a half and savor the splurge back at your desk.

1 P.M. Goal: De-stress at lunch

If your morning tasks leave you anxious, try a salad with spinach, summer squash and zucchini topped with quinoa on your break. The vegetables provide plenty of vitamin B6, which helps make mood-stabilizing neurotransmitters and aids nervous system function. Quinoa, a complete protein, is rich in magnesium, and that relaxes blood vessels and muscles, says Boone. You can also sprinkle maca root powder on top, she adds. The nutty-tasting veggie may enhance the body's natural ability to respond to stress, she says.

3:30 P.M. Goal: Beat an afternoon energy slump

You may want to reach for a sweet latte, diet cola or bag of candy to battle afternoon fatigue, but caffeine can prevent you from falling asleep later, while sugar can bring on a crash that leaves you even more tired. A snack of whole foods, on the other hand, provides real energy for a productive afternoon. Try an ounce of nuts, like almonds, walnuts or pecans, or a nut-and-fruit bar like a Larabar. Bonus: Moderate nut consumption has been linked to a slightly lower weight and waist circumference, finds an analysis of many studies published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

5 P.M. Goal: Fuel up for a workout

An early evening workout may bolster your performance and energy at the gym, according to a small 2009 study. So if you're heading there after work, make sure you adequately fuel your muscles. Aim for easy-to-digest carbs, which provide a quick hit of energy without upsetting your stomach. Think a small smoothie with milk, yogurt and berries. If you're not hungry, drink coconut water -- it's got sugar and electrolytes to keep you pumped and hydrated, says Boone.

7 P.M. Goal: Stay slim at dinner

You're probably more sedentary after supper, especially when the temperature drops in winter. Though the best way to torch calories is with a post-meal walk, you can also bump up your burn by adding chili peppers to your meal. The heat from their capsaicin can help spike metabolism and control appetite, according to research from Purdue University. Another slimming strategy: Cook with herbs and spices. When people ate a reduced-fat but spiced-up meal in a University of Colorado study, they reported liking it more than the full-fat version. Why? Spices contribute loads of flavor, but zero calories. So shake on smoked paprika, oregano and garlic powder.

10 P.M. Goal: Fall asleep

If you're having trouble catching zzz's, first ask yourself if you're hungry. If so, pour yourself a glass of vanilla soymilk, suggests Anderson. It contains carbs, which promote the production of tryptophan, the amino acid that makes Thanksgiving dinner guests need a nap after turkey. "The body uses it to produce serotonin, a neurotransmitter that tells the brain to go to sleep," she says. Plus, the calcium in the drink helps relax blood vessels for an extra calming effect.