



# Using a Food Diary

**A**n important step in any weight management program is understanding one's eating habits and what triggers excessive eating. The food diary is an important tool in dietary self-awareness.

## What to Put in a Food Diary

A typical food diary has an entry for every time something is eaten. It may include:

- the time of day.
- the time spent eating.
- the place where eating took place.
- any other activities done while eating.
- your mood at the time of eating.
- the food and amount eaten.
- the level of hunger at the time.

A food diary may also include an estimate of the number of calories or other nutritional information on the food eaten.

## Why Keep a Food Diary?

Food diaries serve two purposes. One is to shed light on what kinds of foods are being eaten, how much and the nutritional value of the food. The other purpose is to help the eater understand more

about his or her eating habits and the things that trigger eating in order to develop a strategy for changing those habits and avoiding the triggers. For instance, if a diary shows eating is triggered by boredom rather than hunger, this is a signal to develop other ways of relieving boredom. If extreme hunger is the trigger, smaller, more frequent meals and light, high-fiber snacks might be the answer.

## Interpreting Your Food Diary

Keep your food diary for at least two weeks before making any changes in your diet. Try to find any unhealthful eating patterns that you can change or redirect. If you have trouble interpreting your food diary entries or need help coming up with a healthier nutrition program, consider making an appointment with a registered dietitian. Look in the yellow pages of the phone book under "Dietitians," ask your doctor for a referral, call the American Dietetic Association (ADA). Get the ADA's toll-free number by dialing information at 800-555-1212 or visit [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).

Studies show that a combination of sensible eating habits and regular exercise is far more effective than so-called "diets" in taking weight off and keeping it off.