

Food that keep you fuller for longer

How your blood sugar levels affect you

When you go for a long period without eating, your blood sugar levels can drop, causing you to feel shaky, weak and nauseous. Low blood sugar levels will affect your concentration, energy levels and mood. Apart from stopping you from functioning at your best in the short-term, sharp fluctuations in blood sugar levels can affect your long-term health. Research shows that people who eat a lot of sugary foods have a greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Carbohydrates such as sugars and starch mainly determine your blood sugar levels. The effect of sugars from sweets, biscuits and chocolate is unhelpful because they are quickly absorbed into the bloodstream and cause a rapid rise in your blood sugar levels followed by a rapid drop. The effect of starch from bread, pasta, rice, cereals, beans and lentils is more helpful. These take longer to break down and are more steadily absorbed by your body. This means they are better for keeping your blood sugar levels stable over a longer period.

Glycaemic Index

GI stands for Glycemic Index and is a measure of the impact of food on your blood sugar. Foods with a high GI will raise your body's blood sugar levels quickly; by contrast foods with a low GI will raise them more slowly and over a longer period.

Eating lots of high GI foods has two disadvantages:

- 1) The rush of energy given by high GI foods does not last and is soon followed by an energy lull. So you get hungry and want to eat more.
- 2) After eating high GI foods you will have a lot of readily available energy in your blood. Your body will use this energy first rather than other stores of energy like body fat. This makes it harder to lose weight.

Aim for foods that have a low or moderate GI count, such as oats, pulses and wholemeal varieties of bread and rice.

How can the GI Diet help weight loss?

By eating meals that have a low GI you will feel less hungry. This means that rather than controlling your cravings for food by will-power alone, you are controlling them by satisfying your body. On the GI diet your desire to snack or over eat should be greatly reduced, therefore by eating fewer calories you can control your weight.

Don't skip breakfast

Your blood sugar levels drop at night, so it's important to refuel your body first thing in the morning. You are more likely to snack on sugary foods later in the day if you skip your breakfast. Ideally, breakfast should contain about 25 percent of your daily calorie intake, and have a good mix of starchy carbohydrates, protein and fibre.

Healthy breakfast choices

Muesli and porridge contain plenty of slow-burn starchy carbohydrates and fibre. Fruit such as dried apricots, grapefruit, kiwi fruit, bananas or oranges are rich in vitamins and will help to sweeten your cereal. Dairy products such as skimmed or semi-skimmed milk and low-fat yoghurts are rich in protein and calcium.

Don't skip lunch

Ideally, lunch should be the largest meal of the day, but often this simply isn't practical. Some people miss lunch entirely, or grab a sandwich and eat it on the move. Stop yourself from falling into this trap by planning ahead and preparing a healthy packed lunch to take to work. Even a light lunch makes it less likely that you will be reaching for the crisps and chocolate mid-afternoon.

A lunch based heavily on carbohydrates can sometimes leave you feeling sluggish and sleepy in the afternoon. Eating protein-rich foods with smaller portions of bread, potatoes and rice should help to prevent this. Adding a piece of fresh fruit or a salad will help to keep you on course for the recommended daily five servings of fruit and vegetables.

Healthy lunch choices

Protein-rich foods such as chicken, lean meat, oily fish (such as tuna, smoked trout or mackerel), eggs, nuts, cheese, pasta cooked chickpeas, beans, kidney peppers and raw sliced vegetables are options for a low GI lunch that will keep you alert for the afternoon.

Snacking sensibly

There is nothing wrong with having a snack to overcome the occasional energy dip during the day. The trick is to go for low-fat snacks that will satisfy your hunger for longer.

- Fresh fruit - apples, cherries, grapes, oranges, pears and plums.
- Dried fruit - dried apricots, apple rings and banana chips.
- Raw vegetables - try these with hummus or low-fat cottage cheese.
- A handful of nuts and seeds.
- Low-fat fruit yoghurt or fruit smoothie.
- Plain digestive or rich tea biscuit.

Drink plenty of fluids

Dehydration causes loss of concentration, dipping energy levels and headaches, and it's easy to forget to stay hydrated when you are busy. Keep your fluid levels up by drinking water, juice or herbal teas. Aim for at least six to eight glasses of fluid a day and limit your caffeine intake.

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans, log on to www.whelehans.ie or dial 04493 34591. You can also e-mail queries to info@whelehans.ie.