

Nighttime Eating

IS IT BAD TO EAT AT NIGHT?

- Here's a better question: Does eating at night make sense for you?
- There's nothing inherently bad about eating at night.
- It's more about *how* we eat at night than *if* we eat at night. Nighttime eating often involves not-so-healthy options, and too much of them.



WHEN IT MIGHT MAKE SENSE:

- It fits your schedule.
- You're genuinely hungry.
- You can stop when you are satisfied.
- You feel in control during the experience.
- You are left feeling better physically and mentally.
- Red flags about nighttime eating include: 1) you feel out of control around food, 2) you experience guilt after eating and 3) you eat more than is comfortable for you on a regular basis.



Common Causes of Nighttime Eating

- **Skipping meals:** If you ignore hunger cues and skip meals during the day, you are likely to feel hungrier later.
- **Imbalanced meals:** A blood sugar rollercoaster caused by a low-nutrient diet can make appetite and cravings feel inconsistent and intense.
- **Unsatisfying meals:** If you regularly eat foods you don't enjoy and/or don't let yourself have the fun stuff, your cravings are going to feel overwhelming.
- **Habits:** Maybe you have gotten used to eating as part of your nighttime routine, or as part of something else you do at night (e.g. watch TV, scroll the internet, etc.)
- **Emotions:** Using food to cope with stress, anxiety or boredom is common, but does not solve the real issue at hand.
- **Access to food:** Being at home with access to multiple food options makes us even more vulnerable to nighttime eating.

Strategies for Nighttime Eating

- **Eat when you are hungry and don't skip meals :** When we're busy during the day, it can feel easy to ignore hunger and skip meals. But your body finds a way to make up for what it missed, especially when you are home at night with easy access to food. Honoring your hunger throughout the day can prevent out-of-control eating at night.
- **Focus on fiber and protein:** Consuming fiber and protein throughout the day will help stabilize your blood sugar levels , meaning your appetite and cravings won't feel like a rollercoaster.
- **Eat foods you enjoy:** If you don't enjoy what you eat or deprive yourself of fun foods, you may have more nighttime cravings. Consider adding small amounts of fun foods to your routine throughout the week so that you don't feel deprived.
- **Keep nutrient-dense (and appealing) foods on hand:** Stock food you like, but that also offer nutrition. And make them just as easy as grabbing a bag of chips - make the better choice the easy choice!
- **Eat a bigger dinner:** Consider adding more food at dinner (and at other meals, if needed) to see how that changes your evening hunger levels and urge to snack. If your meal feels big enough, consider playing with proportions - a little extra protein and fiber can make a huge difference!
- **Make a new routine:** Maybe you are snacking just because it's a habit? If so, explore other activities that might feel relaxing and fun in the evening. If eating has become attached to other activities, consider how you can break the association (e.g. watch TV upstairs away from the kitchen)
- **Eat more mindfully:** It's hard to feel satisfied from your food when you are multitasking or distracted. And when you aren't satisfied, you'll go looking for more food. So when you decide to eat, just eat, and limit distractions. And don't eat out of packages - portion out what you plan to eat onto a bowl or plate.
- **Prioritize rest:** Poor sleep can make us feel hungrier and crave less healthful foods. So if you are feeling snacky at night, go to bed early and make a healthy investment in the next day!
- **Ask yourself "What am I feeling, what do I need?":** This is especially important when emotions, and not physical hunger, are driving your urge to eat. You have to address the root cause, otherwise eating is just a band-aid.
- **Keep a journal:** Instead of a traditional food journal, track what you are eating, why you are eating, and how it makes you feel (physically and emotionally). Look for patterns that can help shed light on what is happening.

