

# FitFacts®

## Keeping a Food Journal

A FOOD JOURNAL (ALSO CALLED A FOOD LOG OR DIARY) IS A RECORD OF EVERYTHING THAT YOU EAT AND DRINK DURING A 24 HOUR PERIOD. A GROWING AMOUNT OF RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT PEOPLE WHO KEEP A FOOD JOURNAL ARE THE ONES WHO LOSE THE MOST WEIGHT AND KEEP IT OFF THE LONGEST.

1. **Record *everything* that you eat and drink.** Not only do your main meals matter, but your drinks, snacks, and nibbles do too. The handful of crackers while packing the kids' lunches, the cookie from the break room at work, and that glass of wine after dinner can all add up in a big way. When you keep track of every bite and sip, you become more aware of calories that sneak in throughout your day.
2. **Be as specific as possible.** Include whether foods were part of a meal or snack, the time it was eaten, how it was cooked, and if anything was added (such as dressings, condiments, salt, etc). Record food and drinks right after consumption so that you don't forget the details.
3. **Include amounts or serving sizes.** Most of us overestimate serving sizes. Pay attention to how much food is actually in a serving and record how much you are eating.
4. **Pay attention to your hunger level.** Record your hunger level before eating (0= not hungry at all, 10= starving). This can help you learn if you are eating because you are hungry or for other reasons such as boredom, happiness, or anger.
5. **Describe your mood or thoughts before eating or drinking.** Pay attention to how you feel as you are eating. Are you rewarding or punishing yourself with food? Are you feeling shame or guilt? Write these thoughts down as you become aware of them.
6. **Make recording food intake a daily habit.** If you can't track your food intake every day, do it on most days of the week and especially on days that you are prone to over-eating or making less healthy food choices.
7. **Choose the format that fits your lifestyle.** Your food journal can be kept in a notebook, a computer spreadsheet, on a website, or by using a phone "app." Several of the internet programs have a large database of foods to choose from so that you may easily keep track of calories and other nutritional information.
8. **Find an accountability partner.** It is helpful to find someone with whom you can "check-in" on a regular basis. Choose a supportive, non-



judgmental friend, family member, co-worker, health coach, personal trainer, etc.

9. **Check out online resources and apps.** Many online programs and apps are available to help make food journaling easier. For example, the USDA's [Supertracker](#) offers one tool to try. Others include [MyNetDiary](#), [Calorie Counter](#), [MealLogger](#), and [MyFitnessPal](#).
10. **Feeling overwhelmed?** If the thought of keeping a food journal seems impossible to you, try breaking it up into small pieces. Start by recording your basic food intake for a few days. Once you have mastered this, start paying attention to how many servings you eat. Add more details to your journal as you become more comfortable with the process.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

[American Council on Exercise](#)

[American Council on Exercise—Fit Life](#)