



Diet Rules That Are Meant to Be Broken

If you don't eat red meat or snack after 8 p.m., girl, it's time to loosen up. The secret to slimming down is finding your happy medium (or medium rare).

Sticking to certain diet must-dos may be sabotaging your skinny-jeans goal. “A black-and-white ‘This is good, this is bad’ mentality sets you up for failure,” says Judith Beck, Ph.D., author of *The Beck Diet Solution*. “With one minor dietary infraction, the mind-set becomes ‘I’ve blown it, so I might as well keep going.’” Even worse, you may be following faulty advice. Learn why you should break these eight hard-and-fast diet rules—and get ready to drop a size, you rebel, you.

The rule Swear off red meat to cut calories.

Smarter strategy Enjoy an occasional hamburger for the protein—and yumminess—it provides. “Protein takes longer to digest, so it keeps you full,” says Jonny Bowden, Ph.D., a weight-loss coach and author of *The 150 Healthiest Foods on Earth*. Plus, studies suggest that it can help suppress your appetite. When researchers at University College London fed mice a high-protein diet, the rodents produced more of a hunger-fighting hormone called peptide YY and put on less fat than the mice that didn’t receive as much protein. Red meat gets a bad rap because certain cuts (like those labeled “prime”) are high in artery-clogging saturated fat. So keep it lean with “round” and “loin” options (as in top round, sirloin and tenderloin) and ground beef that’s 5 percent or less fat. Eat no more than two servings, or five ounces, of lean meat daily (a serving is about the size of a deck of cards) and no more than 18 ounces a week. Vary your options with other protein powerhouses, like fish, poultry and beans.

The rule Don’t eat after dinner.

Smarter strategy Your body doesn’t magically store more fat

and calories after a certain hour, so if you work out in the evening or feel famished, there’s no need to go to bed with a grumbling tummy. “You can slow your metabolism if you don’t give your body fuel when it needs it,” says Christine Mastrangelo, R.D., founder of New England Nutrition Associates. The trick is to choose a healthy snack, such as whole-wheat pita chips and hummus or three cups of air-popped popcorn. If you nibble at night, Mastrangelo suggests that you start each day by planning ahead for those calories. “You’ll be less likely to reach for traditional late-night munchies, such as potato chips and ice cream, when you know you’ve allotted only a small number of calories for your evening snack,” she explains.

The rule Hold your ground against cravings.

Smarter strategy Indulge yourself—in moderation. Sure, you can try to substitute your way out of a craving, first by noshing on an apple, then a couple of graham crackers, followed by a fat-free pudding. But you’ll probably end up consuming more calories than if you had simply enjoyed a few squares of chocolate or whatever it is you really want, says weight-loss expert Kara Mohr, Ph.D., owner of the fitness and nutrition company



Hold on,
low-carb queen:
Cutting out
healthy whole
grains sets you
up for major
carb cravings.

Mohr Results, Inc. “Psychologically, we’re tempted by what we can’t have, which is why deprivation makes us desire ‘forbidden’ foods more than usual,” she says. When you do give in, odds are good that you’ll devour more than you should, according to a study in the *International Journal of Eating Disorders*. Researchers at the University of Toronto found that women who were deprived of chocolate for a week experienced more cravings and ate more of the sweet stuff than those who weren’t denied it. Still, it’s best not to keep temptation too close to home. “This way, when a craving hits, you’ll have to go to the nearest store to get something,” Mohr says. You’ll burn calories along the way, or you’ll decide it’s too much trouble and skip the trip altogether.

The rule Bread is the enemy.

Smarter strategy Despite what disciples of the low-carb craze profess, bread—the whole-grain kind, of course—is an ally in the battle of the bulge, because the complex carbohydrates it contains provide filling fiber. “It’s the easily digested refined carbs—the ones in white bread, crackers and pastries—that lead to weight gain. They don’t fill you up, so you get hungry quickly and end up consuming more calories,” Mohr says. And there’s a good reason you crave carbs: They are your body’s preferred source of energy. “A drastic cutback only sets you up to OD on mac and cheese or chips later,” Mohr adds. If bread still scares you, try a lower-calorie option, such as Arnold 100% Whole

Wheat Sandwich Thins or Flatout Flatbread's Healthy Grain Honey Wheat. With about 100 calories and five or more grams of fiber and protein each, they really are the best things since sliced bread.

The rule Be afraid of fat. Be very afraid.

Smarter strategy Focus on healthy fats—the unsaturated mono, poly and omega-3s in fish, nuts, seeds and olive oil. The real bad guys, saturated and trans fats, which clog your arteries and increase your risk for heart disease, are found in foods you shouldn't be eating a lot of anyway: chips, crackers, fried foods, butter and fatty meats. "Healthy fats help your body break down and absorb nutrients like vitamins A and E and beta-carotene in fruits and vegetables," Mastrangelo

Raise the bar when you order a drink: Skip light beer for a more satisfying brew. Now, that's happy hour!

says. In fact, one study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* suggests that you won't reap the full nutritional rewards of salads and raw veggies without a little healthy fat thrown into the mix. Try a handful of walnuts (that's about 12), a tablespoon of sunflower seeds or a drizzle of olive oil-based salad dressing.

The rule Avoid the drive-through at all costs.

Smarter strategy You only think an energy bar or protein shake is a better bet than a fast-food fix; a real meal will more fully satisfy both your hunger and your need to feed your face, as well as provide protein, fiber and nutrients. Thankfully, most chains these days offer healthy options. "Skip the cheese, mayo and creamy sauces;

ask for grilled, not fried, dishes; and order the smallest size available—a single hamburger, not a double, and nothing supersized," Mohr says. When you pull up to that window, request one of these three picks: a grilled chicken sandwich or a hamburger, either loaded with extra lettuce and tomato; or a salad with grilled chicken (get reduced-fat dressing and forgo croutons and cheese).

The rule Stick to light beer at happy hour.

Smarter strategy Don't let the label fool you. The term *light* isn't regulated and can be misleading.

efforts. So don't get too happy at happy hour: Stop after one round.

The rule Reach for 100-calorie packs when you snack.

Smarter strategy Don't be suckered into thinking that portion-controlled packs are good for you. Just like the regular sizes of cookies and chips, they're loaded with artificial sweeteners, corn syrup and partially hydrogenated oil (the prime source of artery-clogging trans fat), says J.J. Virgin, a nutrition and fitness expert and author of *Six Weeks to Sleeveless and Sexy*. "You'll still feel hungry and unsatisfied after eating

If your pantry is packed with 100-calorie snacks, it's likely you're going overboard on portion control.

It means only that the brewski has fewer calories than the company's regular brand. At 110 calories, a 12-ounce bottle of Bud Light has a mere 35 fewer calories than a regular Bud. "A 'light' label is not justification for downing a six-pack," Bowden says. Chances are, you'll be more satisfied with just one robust brew that you truly enjoy rather than two or more of the watered-down version. Whatever you prefer, though, know this: Your system converts any alcohol, even the light stuff, into acetate. Once this substance hits your bloodstream, your body burns it instead of fat for energy, essentially slowing your metabolism and putting the brakes on your weight-loss

one of these bags, because it lacks important hunger fighters, like protein and fiber," Virgin explains. That means you'll soon be reaching for bag number two. Need another reason to shelve the mini munchies? A recent study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* found that dieters devour more when they eat from small packages. If you like the convenience of grab-and-go packs, make your own at the start of the workweek. Snack-size ziplock bags can hold these superior 100-calorie treats: six wheat crackers spread with two teaspoons of peanut butter (sandwich them to prevent a mess), 15 almonds or 10 cashews, three-quarters of a cup of blueberries and 15 chocolate-covered raisins. ■



Got a weight-loss woe? Go to our Diet Help Desk at fitnessmagazine.com/helpdesk, where diet dream team Chris and Kara Mohr (he's a dietitian, she's a weight-loss expert, and they're both exercise physiologists) will answer your questions.