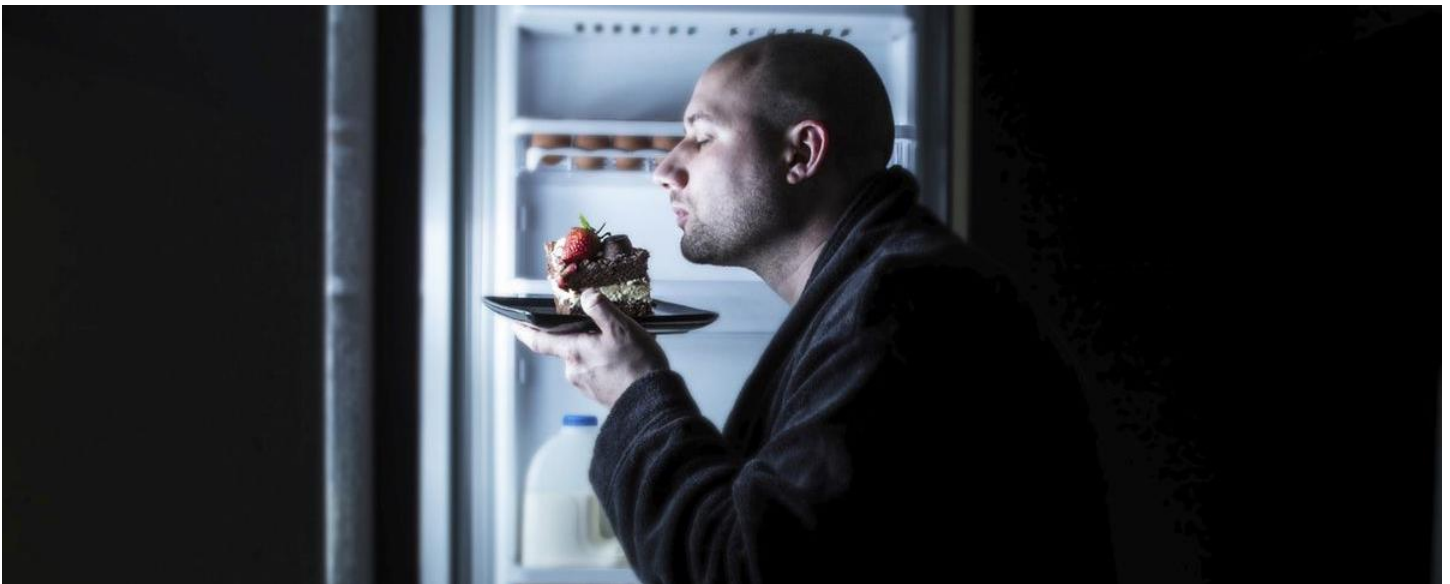


How to Stop Eating After Dinner

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Is the last piece of cake in the fridge taunting you? Just before you reach for it, Julie Beun-Chown has this advice on how to give night-time munchies the flick. It always starts innocently; a few chocolate biscuits while watching television or a handful of crisps after dinner. Suddenly, the packet or bag is empty and you've become a night-time snacker.

"We can end up consuming a lot of kilojoules that we're not even aware of," says nutrition author Charles Stuart Platkin. The question is, why do we do it? "Obviously, there is emotional eating," points out diet expert Dr Michelle Schoffro Cook, who says snacking not only means extra kilos, it also disrupts sleep patterns and can cause acid reflux. "For others, it can be routine, like having dessert after dinner. But, if we're actually craving certain foods, it may be a clue that our diet is in poor shape during the day." Stepping away from the fridge after the kitchen is closed can be hard, so we asked four diet experts for their top 20 anti-snacking tips.



1. Keep a food diary. "It helps you see what you're eating and stops you in your tracks," Jim Karas says. Or, try reading the list of ingredients in your preferred treat as reviewing the calorie count may take the edge off your appetite. "People can consume another one-third of their daily calorie intake in after-dinner snacks alone," he says. "That daily intake translates into more than 4.5kg extra a year."

2. Drink water or green tea. Your brain may think it is hungry, but Karas says it's more likely that your body is thirsty. "By drinking water, you'll fill up, stay hydrated and feel better, especially if you've had beer or wine with dinner."

3. Chew gum or brush your teeth. Gum will satiate after-dinner cravings for sweets, while chewing sets off appetat, the appetite-controlling trigger that tells the brain you're full. Brushing your teeth before you settle in for the night also sends the message that you have finished eating for the day.

4. Choose one anti-snacking tip and try it. "If it doesn't work, try another one until you find something that works," Karas says. "Think of it as a basket of things you can choose from. The first may not fit, but the next one might."

5. Consider changing your daily diet. Dr Michelle Schoffro Cook believes that cravings often indicate insufficient whole grains, vegetables and complex carbohydrates in a diet, and an overabundance of salty, fatty foods.

6. Eat more nuts, seeds, fish and green, leafy vegetables during the day, if you crave chocolate at night. According to Dr Cook, 'chocolism' may actually indicate a magnesium deficiency, which is common among 80 percent of the population. "It's easy to end up low in this essential mineral," she says.

7. Sitting down with a plate of cake may feel like just desserts after a hard day's work, but that sweet craving could also spell blood-sugar problems. "You are either not eating frequently enough or you're eating foods low in fiber and high in complex carbohydrates. Either of these may put you on a blood sugar rollercoaster," Dr Cook says. "Throughout the day, avoid simple carbohydrates like white flour pasta, potatoes or rice, and choose beans, legumes, and wholegrain pasta and rice instead."

8. Supplement your diet with vitamins B5 and C, if you are stressed and can't stay away from salty snacks. Such cravings may indicate an overworked adrenal gland, which regulates the body's stress response. "Supporting your adrenal gland, if you're undergoing a lot of stress, is important."

9. Eat a handful of almonds throughout the day. "Almonds or other non-meat protein helps regulate your appetite and blood-sugar levels," Dr Cook says. If you're not nuts about nuts, have an avocado which is loaded with healthy fats and contains more usable protein than a standard-sized steak.

10. Don't entirely deny yourself snacks or you'll feel deprived. "Going cold turkey is just not going to work for a lot of people," Charles Stuart Platkin warns. "You have to be aware that you're adding to your daily energy intake, so eat less during the day and have a healthy snack at night."

11. Don't store tempting foods in the house. "There have been many nights when I've looked in the fridge and thought, 'There's nothing to eat'," Platkin says, whose indulgence is ice-cream. "That's because I don't have it around. Knowing you're a snacker and having your favorite snack foods in the house is a terrible combination. Just don't keep them around."

12. Shop for low-calorie substitutes. "Think about your favorite snack foods and then look for low-calorie versions, like a low-fat ice-cream or air-popped popcorn. Whatever you choose, it has to be tasty enough to be a sustainable and permanent substitute."

13. Pre-package after-dinner snacks. Just because it is a low-fat or low-calorie snack doesn't mean you should eat the entire packet, Platkin says. Instead, plan ahead by putting suitable amounts into smaller bags or containers, as pre-emptive portion control.

14. Pause before you eat. "Make a note to yourself that you won't eat anything over 400 kilojoules without first stopping to think about it for a few seconds," he says. "Ask yourself if it's a nutritional snack or just splurge worthy."

15. Breathe deeply and reduce your levels of cortisol. According to a study from The University of Utah, women with Binge Eating Disorder (BED) who breathed deeply reduced their snacking by half and cut their levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, by 25 per cent. "We expel 70 per cent of our toxins through breathing, which can have a calming effect on the body," says Platkin. "Cortisol triggers cravings for sugary or salty snacks, so anything that controls cortisol is good." Alternatively, set the stage for food-free relaxation by having a warm bath while listening to soothing music.

16. Eat five or six small meals that contain complex carbohydrates every day. Eating smaller more regular meals will help to slow the pancreas' insulin production, meaning your body stores less fat, but burns more of it. "As an added benefit of eating smaller amounts of complex-carbohydrate meals more frequently, you will actually notice an overall decrease in your appetite," Dr Stutman says, because blood sugar is regulated and the meals take longer to digest.

17. Never eat in front of the television or computer, keep food out of sight between meals and always eat seated at a table. "Restrict your eating to one main dining area," he says. "This will mean that you are less likely to reach for snacks between meals."

18. Unhappy, depressed or discontented? Chances are you'll crave a protein-rich, fatty food like pizza, which boosts feel-good endorphin levels. To maintain a sustained endorphin release throughout the day, focus on high-fiber grains and lean protein like low-fat cheese, yoghurt, chicken and fish. "These complex carbohydrates and high-protein foods produce both endorphins and serotonin to keep your mood happy and euphoric."

19. There's no doubt that a piece of pie will make you feel better, but it won't last. Beat late-night stress by munching on low-calorie foods like apples, celery or carrot sticks dipped in hummus. "The crunch factor gives your stress-induced anxiety time to calm down without causing a rapid rise in blood sugar," Dr Stutman says. "The process of chewing also causes your facial and neck muscles to relax, which relieves stress and tension."

20. Bulk up on fiber. "Fiber-rich foods take longer to chew and digest than fiber-depleted foods, which gives your stomach time to feel full," Dr Stutman says. Why? Foods with soluble and insoluble fiber, such as fruits, vegetables, wholegrain cereals, sweet potatoes and legumes, are more filling, contain fewer kilojoules and have higher water content. "You are, therefore, eating less and enjoying it more."

