

## **Stay on Track with a Food Diary by the American Institute for Cancer Research**

Many people consider the beginning of the new year as an opportunity for change. A common resolution is to lose weight and lead a healthier life. However, after several weeks, this resolution tends to falter. A food diary may be the tool you need to make changes in your diet last and improve your long-term health.

### **A Diary Can Open Your Eyes**

Recent studies show that writing down what's in your meals and snacks helps create a clear picture of what you eat. By keeping track, you'll be able to spot places in your eating habits where you can make small changes that can have a large effect in losing weight over time.

A daily record can also help you eat better to lower your risk of chronic diseases like cancer. A diary can truthfully tell you how many servings of vegetables and fruits you eat. Besides being low in calories, these foods are packed with natural substances that operate in many ways to ward off disease. For good health and cancer prevention, you should eat at least five servings of vegetables and fruits each day.

### **What You Should Put Down**

If the idea of keeping track of numbers – like calories and portion sizes – seems daunting, just write down what you are eating and drinking throughout the day. A list of foods and drinks alone can be useful.

If you're someone constantly on the go, it's easy to overlook habits that may be holding you back from healthier eating. For example, you may forget that drinking a sugary soda as you do something else adds extra calories without nutritional value. Writing the soda down in your diary will remind you. Other habits to examine are eating while you prepare meals, watch TV or read. Here are other ways a food diary can help:

- **Balance your diet.** If you always list six cookies for dessert, try eating two or three with a piece of fresh food instead.
- **Put your day in perspective.** If you eat two eggs and three slices of bacon for breakfast, try eating low fat, plant-based foods for the remaining meals of the day.
- **Track portion sizes.** Use standard measuring cups and spoons and the USDA standard serving size chart to help gauge how large your portion sizes are and help you cut back if appropriate.
- **Chart your progress.** Set a realistic weight-loss goal for yourself. Weigh yourself weekly and record your progress in a diary.

After a week or two, a detailed diary will show you how to better select your meals and snacks. It's likely that you will also resist more easily giving in to cravings. And remember, if you get off track, confess your imperfection and start up once again.

To begin tracking your daily foods and drinks, call AICR at 800-843-8114 ext. 111 and ask for your free copy of the *AICR Vegetable and Fruit Diary*.

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