



The Salad Strategy to Control Weight

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Maybe you've had this experience: After arriving at a restaurant, ravenously hungry, you first eat a good-sized salad. Later, when the main course arrives, all you can do is nibble and pick at it. If this has happened to you, you've stumbled across a good weight management strategy. Research shows that starting with a large salad can help cut overall calorie consumption at a meal. But your approach to the meal, as well as the salad's size and composition, make a difference.

To prove that salads can cut calorie intake, Pennsylvania State University researchers gave women large, low-calorie salads (three cups total) for lunch before serving them the rest of the meal. The women ate about 100 calories less at these meals compared to meals when no salad was served. The salads included lettuce, grated carrots, tomato, celery and cucumber with limited amounts of reduced-fat dressing.

The women needed to eat large, three-cup salads to reduce calorie intake by 100 calories. Salads half that size, which are more typical of American portions, reduced total calories by only about half as much.

The salads must be low-calorie to help you manage your weight. When salads slightly higher in fat and calories were served in the study, overall calorie consumption at the meal stayed the same. Worse yet, large portions of higher-calorie salads with cheese and regular dressings actually increased overall calorie consumption at meals by 17 percent.

But before you make large, low-calorie salads your primary weight loss strategy, examine your eating style. In a survey commissioned by the American Institute for

Cancer Research, many people report that the amount they eat is not governed by hunger, but by how much food is on the plate. Many people automatically “clean their plate,” regardless of their appetite.

If you are a “plate cleaner,” beware of serving yourself the regular amounts of dishes following the salad. To reduce the total number of calories you eat at a meal, you need to eat smaller portions of the remaining dishes. Your hunger should be satisfied with smaller portions. Furthermore, wait a bit before serving yourself the rest of the meal after the salad. In the Penn State study, the remaining food was served 20 minutes after the salad. That space gave the women time to recognize how much they had already eaten. If you eat quickly, you might still eat the same amount after a large salad, if your body lacks the time to sense its fullness.

While eating large salads first may be a good strategy, simply including more filling, low-calorie foods in your meal should help cut calories, too. Small salads, hearty portions of one or more vegetables, even a broth- or tomato-based soup, are healthy and worth a try. Along with your low-calorie foods, however, be sure that your meal includes some source of protein, whether it is meat, poultry, fish, dairy or vegetarian. Otherwise, within a few hours, you’ll be ready to eat again, and your calorie savings may be wiped out.

The success to a salad strategy for weight control depends upon proper food portions. By filling up primarily on low-calorie foods, like salads, vegetables or light soups, you can cut back on high-calorie, high-fat foods like meats and desserts. That’s one reason why you should switch to a diet that emphasizes vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans. Such a style of eating is the *New American Plate* program that the American Institute for Cancer Research advocates for weight control and better health.

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