



Eat Often, Eat Well: Enjoy 5 smalls each day!

by Robin Mallery, RN

Sound too good to be true?

It is true! Eating often is a healthy approach to food intake—but keep the key concept of this healthful way to eating in mind: SMALL portions.

When we eat often, our body is better able to regulate the balance between blood glucose and insulin. When we eat infrequently and/or take in too much food at one meal, the balance of glucose and insulin is adversely affected, leading to weight gain in the short run, and an increased risk to develop Type 2 diabetes in the long run.

Glucose is the marvelous source of fuel that is derived from eating carbohydrates, and which is used efficiently by our body as energy. Our brain needs energy to compose a piece of music, pay bills, or write a business proposal and our body requires energy to unload groceries, walk up stairs, or ride a bicycle.

Carbohydrates are digested into glucose (sugar) and packaged up to be used as energy. Eating carbohydrates often throughout the day will allow for a relatively stable blood glucose level, keeping our brain and muscles well fueled. A stable blood glucose level will also diminish the chance for becoming ravenous, which may lead to a too-large meal being eaten in response.

Insulin is the hormone, manufactured in the pancreas, which moves glucose into the cell so it can be used as this effective fuel source. When the pancreas is stimulated frequently due to eating small meals often, it releases a regulated amount of insulin—just the right amount required to aid in the proper metabolism of the small meal that was just eaten. The balance between glucose and insulin is maintained.

When a large meal is ingested, both blood glucose and insulin levels become out of balance. The blood glucose level soars in response to the increased amount of carbohydrates now needing to be digested. The pancreas responds by going into an overtime mode and pumps out the additional insulin required to digest that large meal, leading to a rise in blood insulin levels. Unfortunately, the presence of elevated insulin in the blood is closely linked to weight gain and the onset of diabetes.

Eating infrequently may seem sensible if weight loss is the goal. Alas, nothing could be **further from the truth!** Less frequent meals leads the body to perceive a state of deprivation, which actually leads to hoarding of fat and stored fuel (glucose), as the body is not sure when the next meal is coming in! In addition, overall metabolism becomes sluggish with infrequent meals, similar to a car that sits in the garage without being driven often. Stimulating metabolism frequently keeps the process of digestion lean, mean, and efficient.

Side note: Whole grains, beans, legumes, and vegetables are more complex carbohydrates, and take longer to metabolize than simple carbohydrates such as processed white flour products, soda, juice, and alcohol. The longer a carbohydrate takes to be broken down, the more gentle the rise of blood glucose level and the corresponding release of insulin is slower and proportional. Again, this helps to maintain a balance between blood glucose and insulin levels.

Side note 2: Regardless of the complexity of a carbohydrate, the digestion time is still relatively short, compared to that of a protein or fat. It is recommended that carbohydrates be eaten alongside of a good quality, fatty protein. Examples of this combination are: a slice of whole grain bread with a smear of almond butter; a colorful salad with a 3-ounce serving of ahi, chicken breast, or tempeh; yogurt or cottage cheese which have the mix of carb, protein, and fat in one food; or a lentil and barley salad. You get the idea!

Eat well, eat often. Enjoy 5 small meals each day!

Robin Mallery is passionate about food! Starting from where and how it's grown, to how far that food travels to the dinner table, to how it is prepared and savored...Robin blends shopping, cooking, and eating tips with her unique Kitchen Zen and mindful meals approach to enjoying real food.

While you are waiting for her to finish the upcoming book, "Kitchen Zen: The Journey to Nourish Body and Soul in Our Changing World", you can find Robin's sporadic blog posts at heartmatters.pro.