

# 4 SURPRISING BENEFITS OF EATING AT NIGHT

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How many times have you heard someone say that if you want to lose weight you shouldn't be eating at night? Or that eating too late is a sure recipe for weight gain? Despite what you may have heard about this, the answer about whether or not to eat at night, is not entirely clear. In fact, eating certain foods at night can actually accelerate your progress toward attaining your fitness goals.



The physiological truth is that nothing magical happens when the clock strikes 8 or 9 p.m. So, where did this fitness rule come from? People are generally less active at night, which means that they burn fewer calories. In addition, it seems like dinnertime is when people might be at a higher risk of consuming more calories than necessary.

A lot of mindless eating occurs while watching television, and according to A.C. Nielsen, 66 percent of Americans watch TV while eating dinner, so you can do the math. And if you think that because you have healthy eating habits, this won't affect you, think again. A 2011 study published in *Appetite* showed that people who control their diets and calorie intakes are more likely to be influenced by food-related content on television, causing them to eat more calories.

Eating at night isn't bad under the right circumstances. It's mindless eating and eating junk food that are the troublemakers. If you find that you mindlessly snack late at night, then yes, curbing late night calories is important.

That said, here are four surprising night eating strategies that may help you lose weight and improve your performance in the gym:

## 1. LOW GLYCEMIC DINNER TONIGHT CAN HELP CONTROL YOUR BLOOD SUGAR TOMORROW

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Starting your day off on the right foot doesn't just start with getting a good night's sleep. It actually starts beforehand-- at dinner. A study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that what you eat for dinner can affect how your body responds to what you eat for breakfast the next morning. The findings showed that people who ate a low glycemic dinner the night before were able to better regulate their blood sugar after breakfast the next morning. Optimizing blood sugar control is not only important for improving weight loss but also for your overall health.

For a dinner that will help you better control your blood sugar in the morning, try pairing a low glycemic carb like lentils, black beans, sweet potatoes or your favorite green vegetable with a lean protein, such as chicken breast, lean beef or salmon.

## 2. NOT ALL CARBS WILL TURN INTO FAT IF YOU EAT THEM LATE AT NIGHT

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Exercise is the one activity in your life that has the biggest effect on how your body processes and metabolizes food. When you exercise, your body changes what it does with the food you give it. These changes preferentially shuttle nutrients toward recovery, meaning that following exercise your muscles will absorb more carbohydrates. This occurs regardless of time of day. But still many people abstain from eating carbohydrates at night out of fear that those carbs will be stored as fat, even after they have exercised.

Not eating after a workout, especially a tough one, can put a damper in your post-workout recovery as well as your results. In the 45 minutes after a workout, one of your top nutritional priorities should be recovery from exercise as it helps get you and your muscles stronger and better. Don't skip the carbohydrates after you exercise just because it is later in the day. Eat carbohydrates such as sweet potatoes and bananas to refuel your muscles' energy stores so they are ready to go when you are ready to start training again.

### **3. EATING CARBOHYDRATES AT NIGHT CAN HELP CONTROL HUNGER**

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A recent study found that eating carbs at night may actually help you control your appetite throughout the day. In a 2011 study published in *Obesity and Nutrition, Metabolism & Cardiovascular Diseases*, researchers put a group of 63 obese female and male police officers on one of two diets. The first diet plan spread the officers' carbohydrate intake evenly throughout the day, while the second diet plan concentrated the majority of the carbohydrates at dinnertime. The findings showed that the participants who ate most of their carbohydrates at dinnertime experienced hormonal changes that reduced hunger.

The ability to control hunger is a key strategy in long-term weight loss success. A previous long-term weight loss study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* found that your body's hunger sensors don't adapt to you eating less over time. What's more, the study found that hunger hormones remain elevated at least 18 months into dieting. So, as your daily calorie goal becomes lower when you are dieting, instead of separating a small amount of carbohydrates across several meals, it might benefit you to concentrate them during your evening meal.

### **4. PROTEIN BEFORE BED CAN HELP YOU BUILD MUSCLE WHILE YOU SLEEP**

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A myth about eating before bed is that you don't digest food while you are sleeping. This could not be farther from the truth. While you are asleep, your body doesn't stop working – your heart is pumping blood, your lungs are passing air. Strategic eating before you go to bed can help optimize your muscle building efforts. Bodybuilders have long incorporated casein protein-rich meals, such as milk, cheese, yogurt and protein powder, before bed to help boost muscle building while you sleep. Research now supports this cult practice.

A 2012 study published in *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, found that protein consumed immediately before going to bed helps muscle growth, repair and maintenance during overnight recovery after working out. To accelerate recovery from your training sessions, eat a casein protein shake or bowl of Greek yogurt before you go to sleep at night.