

Battle of the Bulge

Do you need a better plan when it comes to controlling your 'middle ground'?

by Chrystle Fiedler

IT'S 2 P.M. AND YOU'RE HUNGRY. Where are you heading? The vending machine or the convenience store? Or, will you try to be good and hold off until you get home, only to raid the cupboards and gorge?

Winning the weight war means having a clear plan of attack, because the battle of the bulge starts with the foods you choose. Here are two easy-to-use eating plans that can help you avoid fad diets and deprivation, along with seven tips to keep you going when hunger strikes.

First, learn what and how much to eat. It isn't as complicated as you might think:

Strategy 1 MyPyramid (www.mypyramid.com), developed by the U.S. government, takes a new approach. "MyPyramid is not one-size-fits-all—it can be personalized," says Elizabeth M. Ward, a nutrition consultant and author of *The Pocket Idiot's Guide to the New Food Pyramids* (Alpha Books, 2006). "A 40-year-old mom who needs to lose weight, a 45-year-old dad who has high cholesterol and a child over the age of 2 in the family all can eat according to the plan." Each person simply eats a different amount from each food group.

MyPyramid's approach is grounded in whole grains, fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy foods, lean sources of protein and healthy fats and oils. "It's all about balance, variety and moderation," Ward says. "You choose your calorie level based on age, gender and activity level, and take it from there. It's a good way to take small steps to make lasting changes."

Strategy 2 Approach healthy eating by looking at how portions fill your plate. To start, refer to The New American Plate from the American Institute for Cancer Research (www.aicr.org). "It's helpful because it's very visual," says Deirdre Larkin-Tingstrom, a registered dietitian and retired lecturer at California State University Northridge who also is a Thrivent Financial for Lutherans member. "It teaches you the correct ratio, for example, of protein-rich foods to whole grains to fruits and vegetables. If you follow this model at each meal, you'd have all the nutrients you need at the end of the day."



On the perfect plate, at least two-thirds of the space has modest portions of vegetables, fruits, fiber-rich whole grains or beans. The rest (one-third or less) is filled with protein-rich foods such as fish, poultry, meat or low-fat dairy products.

Want to take it up a notch to stay the course? Try these bonus tips from our experts:

#1 Plan Ahead In spite of your best efforts, it's easy to make wrong choices, especially when you don't plan ahead. "Failing to plan is planning to fail," says Judy Stone, author of *Take Two Apples and Call Me in the Morning* (Hara Publishing Group, 2002). "Make a plan on paper for the week, shop and prepare some meals ahead of time." Then when you get home from work, you already have healthy-yet-simple meals available. "Planning ahead will prevent you from being caught hungry and without options," she says.

#2 Timing Is Everything What you eat is important, but you also have to consider how you eat throughout your day. While you may prefer to eat three larger meals, grazing on six smaller meals may keep your energy up more effectively.

#3 Don't Skip Breakfast "Breakfast is an opportunity for good nutrition," Ward says. "If we miss that opportunity,

studies show we never really make up for it the rest of the day." Eating a healthy breakfast also helps with weight control. According to the National Weight Control Registry, 78 percent of study participants who lost 30 or more pounds and kept the weight off for more than a year reported eating breakfast most days of the week. And a study in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (February 2005) found that women who ate ready-to-eat cereal for breakfast daily had significantly lower daily fat and cholesterol intake than those who skipped breakfast.

#4 Eat Protein and Whole Grains If you are trying to lose weight, it can help to include protein in every meal, Ward says. "Protein helps you feel fuller longer. It also keeps you away from the junk food." Concentrate on high fiber foods, as well. "Work in at least three servings of whole grains a day. Switch to a whole grain cereal and to whole wheat bread or a whole grain at dinner." (Test your whole grain knowledge with our pop quiz below.)

#5 Stock Up on Healthy Snacks Your biggest ally against hunger can be healthy snacks. Larkin-Tingstrom recommends snacks like homemade trail mix with whole grain cereal, dried fruits and nuts like almonds and walnuts, which have heart-healthy properties. Whole grain cereal can help keep you from plundering the vending machine. Fresh fruit, baby carrots, whole grain crackers with peanut butter or low-fat cheese also can be good choices.

Nutrition Facts

Pop quiz: When you're reading nutrition labels, do you know which ingredients are true whole grains? How many of these qualify?

- Bran
- Brown Rice
- Wheat Germ
- Multi-grain
- Oatmeal
- Wild Rice

Answer:

Brown rice, oatmeal and wild rice.

The "marketing" of whole grains can be deceptive. Ingredients like organic flour, multi-grain and bran sound healthy but aren't true whole grains. The truth is in the label: The first ingredient should be whole grains like brown rice, oatmeal, whole oats, whole wheat or whole rye.

SOURCE: USDA, www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/grains.html

TAKE CONTROL

Use these reminders to stay on track.

DO:

- **Eat at regular intervals** during the day to keep blood sugar, energy and mood stable.
- **Eat high-quality, lean protein** plus at least 1 to 2 cups of vegetables at each meal.
- **Eat breakfast every day** to jump-start metabolism.
- **Keep your refrigerator stocked** with ready-to-eat, cut-up vegetables.
- **Make it a priority** to plan ahead and shop healthy.
- **Be active every day** for at least 30 minutes. Walk to the store. Take the stairs. Park in the farthest spot to have a longer walk to a building.
- **Make changes gradually** but consistently.

DON'T:

- **Keep unhealthy foods** in your house. You're setting yourself and your family up to fail.
- **Hang on to the notion** that healthy eating is boring or tasteless. It takes time to develop a taste for new foods.
- **Take on too many changes at once.** Take it slow.
- **Allow yourself to get too hungry** during the day. Keep snacks handy.
- **Feel guilty** if you eat some of the foods you love. But don't overindulge.

From Judy Stone, author of *Take Two Apples and Call Me in The Morning* (Hara Publishing Group, 2002).

#7 Be Patient and Persistent Don't feel the need to change everything at once. "Little changes add up," says Roberta Duyff, a registered dietitian and author of the American Dietetic Association's *Complete Food and Nutrition Guide* (John Wiley & Sons, 2006). For example, if you usually make a sandwich with white bread, switch to whole wheat bread. Instead of frying your chicken, broil it. If you cook with oil, try canola oil because it is high in Omega-3s. "It may not seem like you're doing much, but when you do it over and over again, it does make a difference," Duyff says. And the best news: Healthy eating can have many fringe benefits like boosting your energy, helping you maintain a healthy weight, improving your sleep and reducing stress. **T**

Chryl Fiedler is a regular contributor to *Thrivent* magazine.



Have a favorite heart-healthy or low-fat recipe or a fitness tip? Share it on the message board at www.thrivent.com/magazine.