

# Timing is everything when it comes to calorie intake

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(HealthDay)—If you skip or skimp on breakfast, grab a quick lunch and

then load up at dinner, your food intake is likely out of sync with your body's needs.

Not getting [calories](#) when you really need them (hint: during the *day*) could be why you're having a hard time shedding pounds or finding the energy to exercise. Here's how to rebalance your [calorie intake](#).

One approach, recommended by sports fitness dietitian Nancy Clark, is to divide your daily intake into four equal meals—breakfast, [lunch](#), a second lunch eaten midafternoon, and dinner—with the calories for the second lunch coming from the ones you're probably taking in during late-night snacking. This keeps your body fueled throughout the day so you have the energy you need when you need it.

Front loading calories also seems to speed weight loss, according to research published in the *International Journal of Obesity*. Researchers from the University of Murcia, in Spain, tracked 420 participants on a 20-week [weight-loss](#) program. All followed a Mediterranean lifestyle with lunch being the main meal of the day. Half were "early" lunch eaters, eating before 3 p.m., and half ate later. Over the study, the early lunch eaters lost significantly more weight than those who ate later (and who also tended to skip or eat less at breakfast than the early lunchers), even though both groups had the same daily calorie intake, did about the same amount of exercise, and got the same amount of sleep.

Speaking of sleep, don't minimize the importance of getting enough shuteye. That—and not an afternoon coffee, energy drink or sugary snack—is the way to avoid a midday slump.

**More information:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture has ideas for [making smarter choices at lunch](#) to maximize nutrition at this all-important meal.

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