

Diet journaling made easier

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(HealthDay)—It's the dieter's Catch-22: Research shows that dieters who keep a food journal lose the most weight and keep it off the longest.

But separate research says "food journaling" isn't as easy as we'd like it to be. It can be time-consuming, plus there's also a reliability issue with online apps that allow people to add foods to the database without verification.

Ironically, packaged and processed foods, which are not as nutritious as fresh, are often easier to enter into a database because they come with mandatory labeling. And it's hard to guesstimate the calories (and sometimes even the ingredients) in restaurant meals or to calculate those in home-cooked meals with many ingredients and hard-to-measure portions.

But you don't have to abandon your diet journal. One solution is to use a reputable website for looking up [calorie counts](#), like "Food-a-pedia" on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's SuperTracker website.

Most diet apps and online journals allow you to create your own master list of foods and even meals that you eat regularly. So, you can enter their calorie counts once and then just tag foods from this list when you eat them.

If the thought of keeping a [food journal](#) still seems daunting, the American Council on Exercise suggests a step-up approach.

First, choose a format you're comfortable with, whether pen and paper or a [smartphone app](#), so you're most likely to use it. Then start tracking everything you eat and drink, including the portion sizes, even if you don't have time to add the calories until later in the day. Take a few moments to review your intake and learn about your eating patterns. This will help you understand when you're hungriest.

Finally, take an hour each weekend to map out the next week's menus in your [journal](#). This way, even if you make slight adjustments, most of the information will already be entered.

More information: For a free and easy-to-use online journal, try the United States Department of Agriculture's [SuperTracker](#).

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