



## 4 Tasty Ways to Enjoy Balanced Lunchtime Meals

Very few Americans enjoy the luxury of a leisurely lunch these days. We're usually too busy eating at our desk or doing errands to really enjoy our food. Even if you have a hectic schedule, the benefits of a balanced lunch are worth the time and effort. And, according to recent research, **how** you eat may be just as important as **what** you eat. Eating slowly and listening to your internal signals of fullness may help prevent afternoon indigestion - and help you maintain healthy weight at the same time! Here are four simple lunchtime tips to help you choose what to eat, what to drink, and how to enjoy your midday meals more.

### **Eat lean with protein in the center of your plate.**

Putting lean protein on your plate helps make a power lunch in several ways. First, lean choices from the meat and beans group give you an important midday dose of protein, iron, and B-vitamins for muscle maintenance and repair. Secondly, lean protein helps with satiety - meaning that you will feel fuller and more satisfied for longer after lunch. It doesn't take a ton of protein to help keep the afternoon munchies away - just 3 to 4 ozs. of fish, skinless poultry, or lean red meat.

### **Eat smart with at least 4 different colors on your plate.**

Color is one of the food cues you can use to get the 40+ nutrients that your body needs. Brightly or deeply colored foods tend to be naturally rich in nutrients - red meats offer iron and zinc, while breads with multiple shades of brown and tan have fiber and a variety of B-vitamins. The rainbow colors of fruits and vegetables are a real nutrition bonanza - different colors often indicate different phytonutrients. Make at least one green and one red/yellow/orange choice for every lunch.

### **Drink well with milk or water in your glass.**

If your lunchtime drink is usually a super-sized soft drink, it's time to make the switch to milk. A single 12-ounce can of regular pop has about 150 empty calories - large drinks can easily have 300+ liquid calories with zero nutritional value. Milk, especially low-fat and fat-free, is an incredibly nutrient-rich choice - lots of nutrition for relatively few calories. After an 8-ounce glass (or carton) of milk, switch to ice cold plain or sparkling water, maybe with a twist of lemon or lime.

### **Start small, slow down, and savor your food.**

In our hectic schedule, lunch is often a super-sized portion of fast food - eaten quickly (maybe in the car) with little time to savor the flavors and little attention to our level of fullness. The more satisfying - and healthier - way to enjoy lunch is to start with a smaller portion (maybe half a sandwich, a cup of soup with a side salad, or shared entree). Take at least 20 minutes to eat - really paying attention to the quality of the meal and to your internal cues of fullness and satisfaction.

**Need some tasty tips for adding more fruits and vegetables to your lunchtime meals?** Help is just a mouse click away at [www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/). Sponsored by the Produce for Better Health Foundation, this site covers just about everything fruit and vegetable: recipes from professional chefs, tips on best ways to shop for and store your produce, and links to a new site just for kids at [www.foodchamps.org/](http://www.foodchamps.org/).