

What is CONSISTENT, ATTUNED and REGULAR EATING?

(CARE Model Meal Plan Basics)

The CARE model meal plan is an essential tool in the treatment of eating disorders. Eating balanced meals and snacks at consistent times lays the groundwork for recovery. Your meal plan provides an organized approach to eating; moreover, it desensitizes feared, binged, or purged foods and ensures that nutrient needs are met.

Following a meal plan has the following benefits:

- Helps in the planning of adequate, well-balanced meals and snacks
- Helps restore natural hunger and satiety cues by mimicking an appetite-based eating schedule
- Reduces food preoccupation and obsessive food thoughts
- Increases knowledge about food and nutrition
- Increases self-confidence surrounding food selection

Pre-planning meals and snacks and “eating by the clock” helps provide the structure and flexibility to be successful in recovery.

How to Use Your CARE PLAN

Your CARE plan outlines a day’s worth of food to meet your nutritional needs. Generally, meal plans consist of 3 meals and 2-3 snacks per day. However, meal plans vary and yours may not follow this pattern exactly.

How to Build Balanced Meals

Building balanced meals and snacks is simple. Each meal contains a source of protein, produce, starch/grain, and fat. Fat will either be included or added to the meal. For example, creamy tomato soup includes fat in the recipe, whereas toast would require an added fat such as butter.

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|--|
| ○ Meal Equation | = | Protein + Produce (fruit or veg) + Starch + Fat
Ex. Scrambled eggs with berries, and toast with butter
Ex. Steak with roasted broccoli, and mashed potatoes |
| ○ Snack | = | Combine two foods from any food group
Ex. Apple and Nut butter
Ex. Cookies and milk |

Food Groups

- **Protein** foods include meat, fish, and poultry, and dairy. Vegetarian proteins include beans, lentils, nuts and seeds, and meat analogs. Proteins are the building block of the body. They are vital in the development, maintenance, and repair of body tissues. Hair, skin, eyes, muscles and organs are all made from protein.
- **Dairy** foods include milk, yogurt, and cheese. Dairy foods provide a unique health cocktail that support bone health. Dairy foods deliver substantial amounts of protein, as well as calcium, potassium, and vitamin D.
- **Produce** foods include all fruits and vegetables - fresh, canned, frozen, and dried. These foods provide substantial amounts of fiber, vitamins, and minerals, as well as antioxidants and phytochemicals.
- **Starch/Grain** foods include bread, pasta, grains, and starchy vegetables (peas, corn, and potatoes). These foods provide substantial amounts of fiber, iron, B vitamins, and potassium.
- **Fats** and Flavor foods include oil, butter, salad dressings, mayonnaise, pesto, and gravies. Certain protein foods such as nuts, seeds, and their butters and oily fish like salmon contain fat. Fats provide energy, aid in the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins (Vitamins A, D, E, and K) and help maintain core body temperature.

Dining Out - Entree plus side(s)

Dining out on a meal plan can be challenging. *Entree plus side(s)* is a guideline that can simplify food decisions when dining out. An “entrée” is a combination dish that includes several food groups. For example, pizza, lasagna, chili, cheeseburgers, and enchiladas are all “entrees.” When using *Entrée plus side(s)*, first select an entrée and then add a side item – maybe fries and a beverage of choice. Examples of sides include French fries, bread and butter, an appetizer, or dessert. *Entrée plus side(s)* meals are not always balanced, and may be missing one or more food groups, which highlights an important fact: Normal eating includes unbalanced eating; Normal eating isn’t “perfect.” Examples of entrée plus side(s) meals include pasta with breadsticks, sub sandwich with chips and a soda, and a burrito with tortilla chips and salsa, and horchata.

Variety: The Buffet Effect

Animal and human studies show that food consumption increases when dietary variety increases *within* the meal. Imagine going to a buffet: If you try a little bit of everything you tend to feel uncomfortably full by the end. Novelty makes food more enticing, so stopping an eating episode becomes more challenging if the meal contains a lot of different foods. However dietary variety across the week is vital! It ensures that vitamin and mineral needs are met, and that meals don’t get repetitive and boring, which can trigger feelings of deprivation. If incorporating variety within meals makes you more vulnerable to eating disorder behaviors, aim to increase dietary variety ACROSS the week, while limiting variety WITHIN meals. *Note this guideline is not a rule, but an option to utilize when struggling with choices and impulsive behaviors around food.*

Appetite Monitoring and Portion Guidance

Portion sizes can be misleading. Eating what is served, regardless of your felt experience, may mean eating more than your body is hungry for. Eating according to a package or label serving size, might mean getting too little. Thus, you cannot always rely on external guidelines to tell you how much to eat, so you will need to recalibrate your “appetate” so to speak.



Eventually you will be able to rely on internal signals of hunger and fullness to guide your portions; however, at the start of treatment, eating regular meals and snacks in “normal” portions is essential. Hunger and fullness work is to come!

CARE NUTRITION BASICS

PREDICTABLE

Eating becomes more organized and predictable. **Eating is LESS CHAOTIC**. Meals and snacks are planned every 2 to 4 hours. Each meal is balanced, containing produce, protein, starch, and fat (3 to 4 food items). Snacks include 1-2 food groups and based on pleasure, nutrition needs and foods available.

PLANNED

Eating is planned at least 24 hours in advance. **Eating is LESS IMPULSIVE**. Pre-planning takes the “mood out of food” so to speak by reducing in-the-moment, emotion-based food decisions.

PUBLIC

Eating “challenge” foods in public. **EATING IS LESS SECRETIVE**. Eating in secret perpetuates the guilt and shame associated with loss of control eating. Eating trigger foods in public incorporates “forbidden foods” in a safe way.

PERMISSION

Eating all foods, not just the “good “ones. **EATING IS LESS RESTRAINED**. “Legalizing” foods so to speak, challenges the diet mentality that perpetuates the restrict – overeat cycle. Reducing restrained eating allows the habituation response to finally take hold.

PORTIONED

Meal and snack portions are “normalized” and less excessive, but **PORTIONS ARE NOT PERFECT**. “Close enough is good enough” is the take home message.

PURPOSEFUL

Eating becomes more mindful. **EATING IS LESS DISTRACTED**. Mindless eating perpetuates loss of control eating. Introducing STIMULUS CONTROL strategies and mindful eating practices reduces overeating episodes and assists with attunement.

PHYSICAL

CARE model meal plans are designed to mimic an appetite-based eating schedule. **EATING IS LESS EMOTIONAL**. Eating is driven by the clock versus what one “feels” like eating or what one is craving.