

## What Happens When You Eat Mini Meals?

Barix Clinics

On Track with Barix | June 2020

You know that eating small, frequent meals after your surgery will help your body get the nourishment it needs to run smoothly. But, who has the time and does it really matter anyway? We've put together some compelling reasons why you should eat mini meals throughout the day and 10 steps to do it the right way. Once you get it down, it's easy and you'll find that you have more focus and more energy to get through your day.



### A Mini Meal?

A mini meal is a small,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup to 1 cup, healthy meal or snack. It generally contains a low-fat protein source along with healthy fat or carbohydrate. A mini snack could be as simple as a 100 calorie pack of almonds, a Greek yogurt, or apple slices with a small smear of peanut butter. A mini meal might be 2 ounces of salmon, a small baked potato with butter and roasted asparagus, or it could be a slice of light bread with 2 oz of lean deli meat and a side of mandarin oranges.

### Why You Should Eat Mini Meals

Take a look at what happens when you eat mini meals throughout the day rather than 2-3 larger meals:

- **Blood Sugar Control.** Six small, protein-rich meals help to keep blood sugar levels within a healthy range, minimizing peaks and valleys. The valleys, dips in blood sugar levels, cause the stress hormone cortisol to rise. A higher cortisol level can lead to cravings, increased belly fat, hormonal imbalance, and decreased immunity.
- **Blunted Reward System.** Rewards are good, right? Not-so-much when it comes to food. When we eat larger meals or sweets, the brain releases chemicals that increase feelings of euphoria. Over time, we learn to see food as a reward and are more likely to reach for it when we're not hungry. Avoiding added

sugars and eating smaller meals helps us to enjoy food and the emotions surrounding it in a moderate and controlled way.

- **Concentration and Mood.** Mini meals fuel your body evenly so you're able to stay focused and calm. Waiting too long to eat crashes your blood sugar level and you feel irritable and agitated. Eating larger meals diverts blood to your gut to aid in digestion-- leaving you feeling sleepy and unfocused.

### Steps to Mini Meal Right

- 1) *Portion right.* The purpose of eating small frequent meals is to spread your intake throughout the day, not to increase the amount of food that you eat in a day. Use the *Meal Planning Guidelines* on pages 3-4 to get right sized portions. Measure food when you can.
- 2) *Graze not.* There are 3 mini meals and 3 mini snacks in each day. That works out to a meal or snack every 2 ½ - 3 hours. Don't eat between meals and snacks; instead this is your time to sip on calorie-free beverages.
- 3) *Choose healthy foods.* Build your diet on lean sources of protein—think lean fish, poultry and meat; dairy and legumes. Add in fresh vegetables and fruits. Balance with small amounts of whole grains. Move away from highly processed foods and eat foods prepared from scratch whenever possible.
- 4) *Look for convenience.* Life is busy and we can't always prep from scratch. Consider pre-cut vegetables and fruit, single serving cottage cheese, and tuna packs just to name a few.
- 5) *Divide protein throughout the day.* Divide protein between meals and snacks. This doesn't have to be exact and it can change based on your meal plan for the day. Here's how it could look:

Protein Goal	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Each Snack (3)
60	14 grams	14 grams	14 grams	6 grams
75	18 grams	18 grams	18 grams	7 grams
90	22 grams	22 grams	22 grams	8 grams
110	26 grams	27 grams	27 grams	10 grams

- 6) *Pack it.* Take your snacks and lunch with you to insure you have healthy options at your fingertips throughout your work day.
- 7) *Start your day right.* Don't skip on breakfast. You need a good protein source at the start of your day.
- 8) *Get efficient.* Rather than getting into the rut of eating out at dinnertime, become an efficiency rock star.
  - Cook once and eat three times by repurposing food. Cook lean ground beef (or turkey) and mix it with marinara sauce to top spaghetti squash one night, season it for Mexican another night and make low-sugar sloppy Joes or shepherd's pie on night 3.
  - Use a slow cooker and you'll have an easy meal ready when you walk in the door.
  - Keep the ingredients on hand for two or more family favorites. It'll be easier to resist the draw of eating out.
- 9) *Prepare for the unexpected.* Keep protein bars, portion-controlled nuts, ready-to-drink protein shakes or other convenient foods on hand for the times when healthy options are not available. Life happens--be prepared.
- 10) *Plan Ahead.* All of this does require that you set aside a little time each week to plan out meals and snacks, stock up on health foods and pack your lunch/snacks the night before. It's well worth your investment of time and energy to insure that you're prepared to eat healthy.

## Meal Planning Guidelines

Use these meal planning guidelines to plan mini meals and snacks to fuel your body throughout the day.

### Meals (200-250 calories, at least 12 grams protein)

#### Select 1 at each meal (6-23 grams protein, 60-120 calories)

Food/Drink	Calorie	Protein	Fat	Carb
Lean cuts of meat (2 oz)	80	16	2	0
Chicken or turkey breast (2 oz)	84	17	2	0
Tuna, in water (2 oz or 1/4 cup)	60	13	1	0
Crab, lobster, shrimp (2 oz)	81	15	1	2
Fish (2 oz)	73	15	1.5	0
Egg (1 large)	72	6	5	0
Egg substitute (1/2 cup)	58	12	0	2.5
Premier Protein (1/2 carton)	60	15	1.5	2.5
Cottage Cheese 2% (1/2 cup)	90	13	2.5	4
Dannon Oikos Triple Zero Yogurt	120	15	0	14
Whey protein powder	110	23	2	2
Fairlife fat-free milk (1 cup)	80	13	0	6
Fat-free milk (1 cup)	83	8	0	12

#### Select 1 for at least 2 of your meals (7-20 calories)

Food/Drink	Calories	Protein	Fat	Carb
Non-starchy vegetable (1/2 cup)	20	2	0	7
Salad greens (1 cup)	7	1	0	1

#### Select 1 at each meal (40-80 calories)

Food/Drink	Calories	Protein	Fat	Carb
Fruit, fresh (1 small piece or 1 cup)	53	1	0.5	13
Sweet potato (1 small)	60	1	0	14
Baked potato (1 small)	60	1	0	14
Bread (1 slice)	78	3	1	14
Bread, light (1 slice)	40	2	0	9
Pasta (1/3 cup cooked)	73	3	0	14
Rice (1/3 cup cooked)	68	1	0	15
Cereal, cooked (1/3 cup)	53	2	1	9
Beans, 1/4 cup	59	4	0	11

**Select 1 for at least 2 meals (45-65 calories)**

Food/Drink	Calories	Protein	Fat	Carb
Cheese (1/2 oz)	57	3.5	4.5	0
Mayonnaise or salad dress. (2 tsp.)	63	0	7	0
Oil (1/2 Tbsp.)	60	0	7	0
Butter/Margarine (1/2 Tbsp.)	51	0	5	0
Salad dressing, ranch (2 tsp.)	48	0	5	1

**Snacks (100 calories, at least 4 grams protein)**

Food/Drink	Cal	Pro	Fat	Cho
Almonds (14)	98	4	8	3
Apple (1/2 medium), Babybel cheese, light (1 wedge)	97	6	3	12
Rice cake (1) and peanut butter (2 tsp)	98	4	5	9
Walnuts (8 halves)	104	4	8	4
Hardboiled egg				
Dannon Oikos Triple Zero Yogurt	120	15	0	14
Kroger Carb Master Yogurt	60	8	1.5	4
Fairlife fat-free milk (1 cup)	80	13	0	6
Kroger Carb Master Chocolate Milk	80	11	0	7
Cottage cheese 2% (1/2 cup), cantaloupe (1/2 cup)	117	14	2.5	11
Babybel light cheese (1) and Ritz crackers (3)	98	6	6	6
Blueberries (1/2 cup), Kroger Carb Master Yogurt (1)	102	9	1.5	14
Strawberries (1/2 cup), Dannon Oikos Triple Zero Yogurt (1/2 container )	104	8	0	13
Cheddar Cheese (1 oz)	113	7	9	0
Deli turkey breast (2 oz), Laughing Cow Light cheese (1 wedge)	95	11	2.5	3
Deli lean ham (2 oz), Laughing Cow Light cheese (1 wedge)	85	11	2.5	2
Robert Irvine's Fit Crunch protein bar (1/2 of 44 gram bar)	95	7.5	4	7
Premier Protein (1/2 container)	80	15	1.5	2.5
Cottage cheese 2% (1/2 cup)	90	13	2.5	4
Shrimp cocktail (5 jumbo with sauce)	110	22	1	10
String cheese, light (2)	100	14	5	1
Soy nuts (1/4 cup)	130	12	6	9