

Healthy meals in 10 minutes!

When you get home after a busy day, you want a no-fuss dinner on the table in 10 minutes. Here's how to make healthy choices.

BY ROXANNE REID.

Even when you're snatching a quick meal to eat at your desk or picking up something readymade on the way home from a hectic day, quick and easy food for you and your family needn't be junk food. We asked Irene Labuschagne and Charlene Goosen, registered dietitians at the Nutrition Information Centre, University of Stellenbosch (NICUS), for some guidelines to help sort out the good from the bad and show us how to stay healthy, even on the run.

Breakfast boost

You need to start right. Yes, you've heard this before, but breakfast really is the most important meal of the day. Skipping it for 'lack of time', or just grabbing a cup of coffee will come back to haunt you, because your energy levels and concentration will plummet long before lunch time. 'Eating a good breakfast helps to maintain healthy body weight and should be a source of dietary fibre and calcium,' says Irene. 'Research also shows it may improve memory and overall performance.'

She recommends avoiding high-fat breakfasts such as bacon and eggs and sticking to quick and easy low-GI options that release energy slowly to keep you functioning at your best. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ **High-fibre, low-fat breakfast cereal** or a cereal bar with low-fat milk or yoghurt, plus a piece of fruit (there's no faster food than a piece of fruit!).
- ◆ **A low-GI wholewheat sandwich** with tomato, cottage cheese and lettuce (pick up one if there's no time to make it), a piece of fruit, coffee or tea with fat-free milk.
- ◆ **A bread roll with one or two cheese wedges**, or toasted bread – preferably low GI and high fibre – with jam, marmite, marmalade or fish paste, and some dried fruit or fruit salad and low-fat yoghurt.



Lunch ideas

Lunch during the week is probably a quick meal, something bought at the deli or canteen. 'Give fizzy drinks, pies, burgers, hot dogs and chips a wide berth,' says Irene. To keep you going all afternoon (instead of crashing at 4pm and reaching for a chocolate), look for:

- ◆ **Sandwiches** made with **wholewheat bread** (for extra fibre).
 - ◆ **Provita** (three equal one slice of bread).
 - ◆ **Fruit and seed bread**, pumpernickel bread, or bread with whole kernels, crushed wheat and oats or oatbran, because these have a low GI for sustained energy.
- Be savvy about **fillings** too. If it's drowning in mayo, it's probably high in saturated fats and bad for your heart – and hips. Healthy choices include:
- ◆ **Skinless chicken**, or **tuna** in brine.
 - ◆ **Low-fat or fat-free cottage cheese**.
 - ◆ **Low-fat cheese** such as mozzarella or low-fat Edam (which contains 50kJ less than cheddar per 30g wedge).
 - ◆ **Boiled egg**.
 - ◆ **Peanut butter**.
 - ◆ **Fruit and vegetables** such as pineapple, tomato, cucumber, peppers, lettuce, mushrooms and chickpeas.

So what's Irene's ultimate healthy and energy-sustaining lunch? 'Try a wholewheat roll or pita bread with a grilled chicken breast, cut into thin slices. Add a salad of lettuce, cocktail tomatoes, peppers and low-fat dressing for a balanced meal.' If you have a work lunch, consider it your main meal and compensate with a lighter evening meal.



Supper sense

When it comes to your main meal, there's no reason you can't grab something from the supermarket or deli on your way home from work or your daughter's karate lesson. Just remember to include a protein, carbohydrate and plenty of vegetables or salad for a balanced meal.

Here are some quick and healthy ideas:

- ◆ **Pasta with tomato-based sauces** instead of cream.
- ◆ **Grilled chicken, fish or lean red meat.** Try to choose chicken or fish – no batter, crumbs or deep-frying – at least three times a week. Add a salad, baked or boiled potato and vegetables for a balanced meal.
- ◆ **Fatty fish** (tuna, sardines, pilchards, snoek) is rich in heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Hake in batter isn't.
- ◆ **Baked potato** with low-fat cottage cheese and salad. Avoid fat-rich fillings (of cheese, bacon or ham). Top yours with finely chopped onion, canned tuna and a teaspoon of sweet soy or sweet-chilli sauce for tang.
- ◆ **Vegetable stir-fry.** Pick n Pay and Woolworths stock a variety of ready-chopped packets, which take three to four minutes to cook when you get home.

Your four-point fruit and veg plan

- ◆ **Salads** are excellent choices, but avoid choosing pasta and potato salads loaded with mayo and dressing. 'Three heaped teaspoons of mayo adds 716kJ and 18 grams of fat to a meal,' says Charlene.
- ◆ Fill up on **tomatoes** and **carrots**.
- ◆ **Eat at least five portions of fresh fruit and non-starchy veg a day**, including green leafy veg, tomatoes, cruciferous veg (cabbage, Brussels sprouts) and dark orange veg (carrots, pumpkin).
- ◆ **Fruit** is rich in antioxidants and fibre and reduces your risk of certain cancers and chronic diseases. 'Small daily choices can reduce your cancer risk,' says Charlene. 'About 60 to 70 percent of cancer cases are directly linked to dietary and lifestyle habits. Fruit and veg may protect against cancers of the mouth, pharynx, oesophagus, lungs and stomach.'

If your diet is high in energy (kilojoules), fat (especially saturated and trans) and salt, but low in fibre, you're more likely to suffer from chronic lifestyle diseases, such as high cholesterol and blood pressure, coronary heart disease, Type II diabetes and obesity. 'A healthy diet and lifestyle can help prevent these diseases,' says Charlene. ▷

How to deal with takeaways

When you're making the occasional takeaway choice – not more than once a week – consider the following:

- ◆ **Cooking methods** can turn healthy food into an unhealthy meal if lots of oil, margarine, butter, mayonnaise or creamy sauces are used. Avoid deep-fried foods, which are high in trans-fatty acids that raise cholesterol levels. 'Stick to steamed, boiled, baked or roasted food,' advises Charlene.
- ◆ **Avoid creamy sauces** – rather have a Hawaiian burger with green salad and a mealie than a creamy mushroom-sauce burger with chips.
- ◆ **Instead of a double cheese burger and chips**, try Nando's Vitality Meal, which comprises a chicken steak, flame-grilled mealie and salad and is endorsed by Discovery Health. Or go for a Steers Chicken Pita, and order a salad to make it a balanced meal.
- ◆ **Sushi is a healthy choice** because fatty fish contains good omega-3 fats and there's no frying involved. Although items wrapped in layers of tuna and avocado may be higher in fat than some other sushi items, they still measure up well against many other fast-food choices. Tuna or cucumber maki rolls are even lower in kilojoules and fat. Spice things up with a touch of fat- and sodium-free wasabi.

Getting snacks right

CHOOSE

- ◆ Veg and fresh fruit, such as peaches, oranges and apples – they're low in fat and high in fibre, vitamins and minerals.
- ◆ Dried fruit (two to three pieces equals one fruit).
- ◆ Fat-free or low-fat yoghurt.
- ◆ Crackers, such as Provita.
- ◆ Popcorn: air-popped without salt or oil.
- ◆ Unsalted nuts (eight to 10 nuts equals one portion).

RATION

- ◆ Energy-dense foods such as chocolates and biscuits.

SHUN

- ◆ Fatty foods such as chips, pies, processed meats (salami, droëwors).
- ◆ Sugary and fizzy drinks and fruit concentrates.



Quick inspirations

Here are some easy-to-prepare, energy-sustaining meals that won't have you slaving over a hot stove:

Sardines with chilli sauce

- ◆ 12 canned sardines
- ◆ 1 cup chilli or curry sauce, readymade
- ◆ 1 small red onion, chopped
- ◆ ½ cup cheese, grated

Arrange sardines in a baking dish and pour over chilli sauce. Top with onions and cheese. Bake at 200°C for 10 minutes, or until browned on top. Serve with a green salad and low-GI wholewheat toast. **Serves 4.**

Chickpea curry

- ◆ 1 onion, chopped
- ◆ 1 garlic clove, chopped
- ◆ 1tbsp olive oil
- ◆ 1tsp ground cumin
- ◆ 1tsp ground coriander
- ◆ 1tsp curry powder
- ◆ 410g tin chopped tomatoes
- ◆ ½ cup water
- ◆ 410g tin chickpeas, drained

Fry onion and garlic in oil until translucent. Add spices and combine. Add other ingredients and simmer until reduced. Serve with brown tortillas or pitas and green salad. **Serves 4.**

Hawaiian chicken stir-fry

- ◆ 1 onion, chopped
- ◆ 4 deboned, skinless chicken breasts, cut into strips
- ◆ salt and pepper
- ◆ 500g frozen Hawaiian stir-fry vegetables
- ◆ 1 cup sweet and sour sauce, readymade (optional)

Brown onion in 50ml water. Season chicken and cook with onions. Add vegetables and cook for around 6 minutes over a high heat. Add sauce and simmer for 3 minutes. Serve with wholewheat rolls. **Serves 4.**

Useful contacts

- ◆ NICUS: 021 933 1408, sun.ac.za/nicus
- ◆ GI Foundation (for low-GI foods): gifoundation.com
- ◆ Association of Dietetics: 011 789 6621, adsa.org.za
- ◆ SASSI SMS hotline: 079 499 8795