



# CONSUMED



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## DON'T EAT AFTER 7 AND SIX OTHER WEIGHT MANAGEMENT MYTHS

By Michelle May, M.D.

Diets are filled with dogma about when, what and how much to eat. Certainly "the rules" are usually based on observations that make sense, but unless you understand why you do certain things, you'll break the rules as soon as the temptation is greater than your motivation. Let's examine some of these myths, where they come from and how to make long term changes that will work for you.

### Myth: Don't Eat After 7pm

Your metabolism doesn't shut off at 7:01 pm so why is this rule so common? It's based on the observation that many people who struggle with their weight overeat in the evening. Most have already eaten dinner so they aren't snacking because they're hungry. They snack because of boredom, television, loneliness and other triggers.

Rather than creating a rule to address those habits, ask yourself "Am I hungry?" whenever you feel like eating in the evenings. If you truly are, eat, keeping in mind that your day is winding down so you won't need a huge meal. If you aren't, consider why you feel like eating and come up with a better way to address that need. Ken, a man in one of my workshops, realized he was just bored so he started doing stained glass in the evenings to entertain himself. Whatever works!

### Myth: Eat Small Meals Every 3 Hours

This rule is based on the fact that many thin people tend to eat frequent small meals. However, most of the thin people I know don't check their watch to tell them it's time to eat – they eat when their body tells them to. They eat when they're hungry and stop when they're satisfied. Since that tends to be a small meal, they get hungry again in a few hours.

Instead of watching the clock, begin to tune in to the physical symptoms of hunger to tell you when to eat. And remember, your stomach is only about the size of your fist so it only holds a handful of food comfortably. By learning to

listen to your body's signals, you are likely to follow a frequent small meal pattern naturally.

### Myth: Don't Let Yourself Get Hungry

This one is based on the belief that overweight people are incapable of controlling themselves when they're hungry. In my experience with hundreds of workshop participants, once they learn to tell the difference between physical hunger and head hunger, the opposite is true.

Think about it. When you're hungry, food tastes better and is more satisfying. My grandmother used to say, "Hunger is the best seasoning." Besides, if you aren't hungry when you start eating, what's going to tell you to stop? Of course, you also need to learn to recognize hunger and make time to eat before you're *too* hungry since it's harder to make great choices when you're starving!

### Myth: Exercise More When You Cheat

I *hate* this one because it has caused millions of people to equate physical activity with punishment for eating. As a result, many people either hate to exercise or use exercise to earn the right to eat.

While it's true that your weight is determined by your overall *calories in* versus your *calories out*, exercise is only part of the equation and has so many other important benefits. Instead of using exercise to pay penance, focus on how great you feel, how much more energy you have, how much better you sleep and how much healthier you're becoming. In the long run, you are more likely to exercise because it feels good than because you're forced to.

### Myth: Follow Your Diet Six Days a Week Then You Can Have a Cheat Day

This is absurd! What if you were a harsh, overly strict parent six days a week then completely ignored your kids every Saturday? How would this approach work for your marriage or managing your employees?

It just doesn't make sense to try to be perfect (whatever *that* is) Sunday through Friday while

obsessing about everything you're going to eat on your day off. Then on Saturday you overeat just because you're allowed to so you end up feeling miserable all day. Huh? Personally, I'd rather enjoy eating the foods I love *every* day, mindfully and in moderation. I call this being "in charge" instead of going back and forth between being in control and out of control.

### Myth: Eat X Number of Calories a Day

Does it make sense that you would need exactly the same amount of fuel every day? Aren't there just days when you're hungrier than others, maybe because of your activity levels or hormonal cycles?

Rather than setting yourself up to "cheat" on those hungry days and forcing yourself to eat more food than you want on your less hungry days, allow yourself the flexibility to adjust your intake based on your actual needs rather than an arbitrary number. Important: for this to work long term, you also need to learn to tell the difference between physical hunger and head hunger.

### Myth: Carbs are Bad (or Fat is Bad)

This "good food-bad food" thinking makes certain foods special. As a result, you may feel deprived and think about them even more than you did before. Worse yet, healthy foods become a four-letter word.

The truth is all foods fit into a healthy diet. Since different foods have various nutritional qualities and calorie content, you can use the principles of balance, variety and moderation to guide you without trying to restrict an entire food group.

### Truth: You Are In Charge

I assume the rule-makers are well-intentioned and don't realize that they've created a tight rope that most people fall off sooner or later. It's time to give yourself the flexibility to make decisions that both nourish and nurture you.

Michelle May, M.D. is a recovered yoyo dieter and the award-winning author of *Am I Hungry? What to Do When Diets Don't Work*. Find additional articles and resources at <http://AmIHungry.com/>.