

## EatingWell

# 5 Things You Should Never Do After 5 P.M. If You're Trying to Lose Weight, According to a Dietitian

Nix these behaviors before bedtime to shed the pesky pounds.



[Laine Younkin, M.S., RD, LDN](#) November 30, 2021

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Don't worry, we aren't going to tell you to stop eating after 5 p.m. However, you might be doing some things from the time you log off work until you hit the hay that are preventing you from seeing the scale move. While a small, sustainable calorie deficit is needed for weight loss, emerging research on circadian rhythms, [timing of meals](#) and [intermittent fasting](#) shows that *when* you eat may be just as important as *what* you eat.



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From mindless eating to staying up too late, here are five things you should never do after 5 p.m. if you're trying to lose weight, according to dietitians.

## 1. Bingeing at the end of the day

Do you have insatiable hunger in the evenings that leads to eating everything in sight? Maybe it's a cheese board at happy hour or a pint of ice cream before bed. First of all, you aren't alone. Second, nixing this habit is easier than you think. Going on diets has conditioned you to "eat less." Therefore, you probably are not eating enough during the day, which backfires at night leading you to overeat.

To prevent bingeing in the evenings, "Make sure you are making the time to eat enough to meet your needs throughout the day," says [Nicole Stefanow, M.S., RDN](#), a culinary nutritionist from the greater New York City area. "This way you aren't

feeling ravenous come clock out. When we let ourselves get too hungry, we are more likely to overeat before our bodies know we are full," she says.

It may seem counterintuitive to eat more throughout the day when trying to lose weight, but eating balanced meals with protein, fiber and fat every three to four hours will prevent overeating at night and help you end the day in a calorie deficit instead of a calorie surplus. And add a midafternoon snack with fiber and protein, such as an apple with peanut butter, so you don't show up to the kitchen starving at 5 p.m. and overdo it on snacks before dinner.

## 2. Eating straight out of the bag

"Don't snack straight out of the bag or box," says Ruth Houston, author of the upcoming book [Eat Smart and Lose Weight: Scientifically Proven Ways to Lose Weight without Diets or Exercise](#). "You risk losing track of how much you've eaten. Measure out one portion for yourself (maybe two). And put the box or bag away and let that be it."

Eating chips straight out of the bag leads to mindless eating, especially if you're doing it while also scrolling on your phone or watching TV. Before you know it, you could consume a meal's worth of calories. "Instead of mindlessly snacking, make a plan for what your evening snack will include (think produce and protein for filling you up and keeping you satisfied) and savor it. Turn off the TV and phone and just eat," says registered dietitian [Julia Stevens, M.P.H., RDN, CPT](#).

## 3. Staying up too late

A [2021 study](#) in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* linked late-night eating to impaired weight-loss efforts and raised triglycerides. The later you stay up, the more hours there are to eat. Plus, most people don't reach for the healthiest of snacks late at night. Of course if you feel hungry, you should eat. But setting a bedtime can help

prevent nighttime noshing that might be keeping the scale from budging. "When you lack structure in your bedtime routine or stay up too late at night, that leaves more time to snack—whether that's out of boredom or just plain habit. Instead, set a timer every night to remind yourself to wind down, and keep Netflix bingeing to a minimum," says Melissa Mitri, M.S., RDN, a registered dietitian and owner of [Melissa Mitri Nutrition LLC](#).

Not getting enough sleep can also lead to eating more the next day, according to a [new study](#) in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. Researchers found that people who got less than seven hours of sleep per night ate more snacks the next day than those who got more than seven hours of sleep. And the snacks were higher in calories and lower in nutrients (think: chips, cookies and soft drinks). This is partly due to a rise in the hormones cortisol and ghrelin, which increase the next day when you don't get enough sleep.

"Aim to put your phone away an hour before bedtime," says chef and registered dietitian [Julie Andrews, M.S., RDN, CD, FAND](#). "It's tempting to catch up on social media or reply to emails before bed, but the blue light can make it difficult to fall asleep. Try a short meditation or drink some decaf tea to help settle down for a good night's rest."

## 4. Skipping carbs at dinner

It can be tempting to skip carbohydrates (or other food groups) at dinner, but if your dinner doesn't fill you up, you'll find yourself rummaging through the cabinets a couple of hours later. "When you don't have a balanced dinner, you'll probably end up consuming a lot more calories (and not the nutritious kind!) once your hunger catches up to you," says Mitri.

"Carbohydrates provide fuel for our brain and central nervous system, and fats help absorb certain nutrients, reduce glycemic impact and also contribute to satiety and

fullness. Proteins are the building blocks for muscles and have the ability to increase metabolism and keep us feeling full and satiated for longer. Eliminating an entire food group could foster feelings of deprivation, and this could lead you to overeat late at night," says [Mariana Dineen, M.S., RD](#), a dietitian and mom of three who specializes in sustainable weight loss.

Make sure your dinner is satisfying too, says registered dietitian [Judy Barbe, M.S., RD](#), author of [Your 6-week Guide to LiveBest](#). Dinner can be healthy without tasting good but, "If you nurture your soul and eat well you'll be less likely to snack later mindlessly," says Barbe.

## 5. Opening the fridge without a plan

Physical hunger isn't the only reason we eat. Eating is pleasurable and comforting, which is why we eat when we're stressed, bored or craving something specific. None of these reasons for eating are wrong, but having a plan in place for each scenario can keep you on track toward your weight-loss goals.

First, set yourself up for success by getting tempting highly processed foods (like potato chips, candy and refined snack foods) out of the house and filling your fridge, freezer and cupboards with more nutritious alternatives, like nuts, fruit, whole grains and lean proteins. Second, make a plan. "Plan your desserts so you don't always reach for high-calorie sweets that may not have many nutrients," says Andrew Akhaphong, M.S., RD, LD, a registered dietitian for [Mackenthun's Fine Foods](#), "Consider having fruit, granola and nonfat plain Greek yogurt in the fridge to make a parfait instead of grabbing a bowl of ice cream that is packed with added sugars. Or perhaps having dessert hummus—which is packed with protein with a hint of sweetness—you could dip fruit in."

No need to feel guilt or shame if things don't go as planned. What you do most of the time matters more than what you do every once in a while, but having a flexible plan in place can help.