

HealthTalk: Eating after Dinner and Weight Gain

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Q: I've heard that eating after dinner leads to weight gain. What is the latest I should eat at night to avoid that?

A: What matters most for weight control is how the total calories you eat all day compare to the total you burn up. The problem with evening and late night eating is how it influences total calorie consumption. Several studies show that people who eat a greater proportion of their calories at night tend to rack up more total calories for the day. For many, evening eating involves calorie-dense foods – foods high in calories in even a modest portion, like chips and sweets. On top of that people may eat in a mindless, distracted way or they eat to relieve boredom or stress so they are not tuning in to the portion needed to satisfy hunger. Both of these situations – foods concentrated in calories and excessive portions – pose trouble for weight control at any time of day. Studies have shown that if their total calories balance out, people who eat in the evening do not gain weight. So while there is no ideal time to stop eating at night, if you do eat after dinner, choose foods with fewer calories per bite like vegetables and fruits, monitor portion size and pay attention while eating.

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The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) is the cancer charity that fosters research on the relationship of nutrition, physical activity and weight management to cancer risk, interprets the scientific literature and educates the public about the results. It has contributed more than \$91 million for innovative research conducted at universities, hospitals and research centers across the country. AICR has published two landmark reports that interpret the accumulated research in the field, and is committed to a process of continuous review. AICR also provides a wide range of educational programs to help millions of Americans learn to make dietary changes for lower cancer risk. Its award-winning New American Plate program is presented in brochures, seminars and on its website, www.aicr.org. AICR is part of the global network of charities that are dedicated to the prevention of cancer. The WCRF global network is led and unified by WCRF International, a membership association which operates as the umbrella organization for the network. The other charities in the WCRF network are World Cancer Research Fund in the UK (www.wcrf-uk.org); Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds in the Netherlands (www.wcrf-nl.org); World Cancer Research Fund Hong Kong (www.wcrf-hk.org); and Fonds Mondial de Recherche contre le Cancer in France (www.fimrc.fr).