

HealthTalk: Soup and Weight Loss

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Q: Does soup really help you lose weight?

A: Some research suggests that starting a meal with soup may help fill you up enough to reduce the calories you consume at the rest of the meal without setting you up to overeat later. For this to work, the soup needs to be broth- or vegetable-based, not a high-calorie cheesy or creamy soup. You are more likely to be successful with this strategy if the foods you eat following the soup are served in smaller portions than your usual amounts, because often overeating is not due to unsatisfied hunger, but a response to big portions.

You can also use soup as a weight-loss aid by making soup your whole meal. Be sure to include beans, chicken, fish or other lean protein along with a bevy of low-calorie vegetables, and perhaps a whole grain like brown rice, farro or whole-wheat pasta.

For overall health, keep in mind that commercial soup can be very high in sodium, often with 500 to 900 milligrams (mg) per one-cup serving. That's a lot of sodium in just one food, since the suggested maximum is 1500 to 2300 mg of sodium for a whole day. Reduced-sodium versions are lower than a "standard" product, but they often contain at least 400 to 600 mg per cup, which is definitely not low-sodium.

Instead, you can purchase soups labeled "low sodium:" these have no more than 140 mg of sodium per one-cup serving. You can also make your own soup, using commercial low-sodium broth, no-added-salt tomatoes or water as a convenient shortcut. Smart use of soup can help you eat more nutrient-rich vegetables and cut calories without going hungry; make it a three-way win by also taking steps to avoid sodium overload.

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