



Why complete a food diary?

A food diary is a powerful tool for self-discovery and can provide insights into your eating habits, emotions around food, and overall lifestyle.

By documenting your daily food intake and food behaviours, you empower yourself and your nutrition consultant with valuable information to create a personalised and sustainable approach to your health and wellbeing.

This guide is designed to help you navigate the process effectively.

Remember that this is a tool for your benefit, and your honesty and commitment to completing it accurately and with detail will contribute significantly to your nutritional journey.

If you have any questions, please ask - sarah@eatthinkexplore.com

Here's to a healthier you!



How to complete your food diary

I keep my food diary template pretty broad. There's a [printable version](#), and a [Google Sheets](#) one - pick whichever works best for you.

Ask yourself which you are more likely to take around with you and fill in, as the more you fill it in as you go, the more accurate it will be.

If you are planning to analyse your food diary yourself, I'd recommend using an app like [MyFitnessPal](#) to record your foods in as it will calculate the calories, macro split and some of the micronutrients can be done for you (this is a little more fiddly). [Click here](#) to bring up my quick guide on using MyFitnessPal...



How to complete your food diary cont.

Date and Time

Simply fill in the day here and the time you ate or drank this. No need to worry about being accurate to the minute, but it's useful to know how far apart your food intakes are and track patterns.

Food; type, ingredients, quantity, brand, cooking method

This is where you can record everything about the food or drink you consumed.

Type: what was it? Chicken and Mayo sandwich? Tomato soup with wholemeal bread? Tuna pasta bake? Birds eye fishfingers, potato waffles and peas? We want drinks in here too.

Include everything - sauces, dips, seasonings, a sweet.

Ingredients: If you made your dinner from scratch, please write out the ingredients list, or put a link to the recipe / take a pic and attach it. It's important to know what actually went into your food as different recipes change the ingredients.



How to complete your food diary cont.

Quantity: Of each of these things how much did you consume? Put it next to each item in the ingredients list (again, if it's in the recipe reference that's fine).

This can be grams and measures if you are cooking, or if eating out, estimate i.e. palm sized, fist sized, matchbox sized.

Cooking method: If it isn't clear in the nature of the item how it was cooked i.e. broccoli could be steamed, roasted or boiled, please state how you cooked it. Did you grill, fry, oven or air fry your fishfingers? Again, if it's in the recipe you can leave this.

Remember to include the oil / salt / seasonings!

Brand: Brands can differ in their ingredients, so if you list the brand and the item, there's no need to record the ingredients as that's available online.

Hunger measure

In this box I simply want a number from 1-10 to indicate how hungry you were before you ate this. 1 is full, 10 for very hungry. This helps us to identify your reasons for eating.



How to complete your food diary cont.

Notes: mood / why are you eating?

This is where we can start to identify your eating patterns and habits and can be incredibly insightful if you let it be. Please be honest.

Things to think about and record:

- what happened before you ate/drank? Was there a difficult situation?
- How were you feeling before hand? Bored, sad, pleased with yourself? How did eating make you feel? Calmer? Happier?
- Where are you? What are the people around you doing? Is everyone else eating? Are you eating with family? In front of the TV? At your desk?
- How is your day going generally?
- How well did you sleep last night?
- Have you done any exercise today?
- Is it a special occasion?
- Did you have a craving for this food?

Also record any digestive symptoms after your food (bloating, discomfort, gas); how did it make you feel?



Food diary top tips

Take it with you and try to record as you go - you will be so much more accurate and less likely to miss things out later.

Record everything and BE HONEST! There's no point doing this exercise if you are not going to get an accurate picture out of it.

Have your phone handy for taking pics of ingredients lists, plates for estimating portion size and recipes.

Don't behave differently. Don't try to eat better or refuse things that you would normally eat.

It's very tempting when you are being recorded to perform 'better', but we are trying to get the best possible picture of your as-is situation so we can really understand what got you here. It's the best way to help you identify which changes are going to have the most impact for YOU. There's no judgement here - I've been through bouts of really terrible eating habits in the past!



Food diary top tips

Choosing days. The more time you can cover, the better average picture you will get. 2 weeks is great, but for many people 1 week will be more likely. You can choose three days over the week (choosing ones that represent your different types of typical days i.e. one in the office, one at home and a weekend day).

Make sure to include snacks and drinks. You can consume a lot of calories in snacks and drinks and it can be very easy to leave these out.

Even water should be recorded (although you don't really need to record much else with it, ingredients, fullness, location etc.), but it's good to track how hydrated you are.

If you're having tea or coffee make sure to record any milk or sugar/sweetener added.

If you miss a day. If you really can't remember the details of a day, it's probably best to scrap it and to continue the diary for another day rather than guess. We are often not that good at remembering everything we ate and drank during a day.



Reflecting on your food diary - next steps

Congratulations on taking the initiative to keep a food diary!

If I am analysing this for you, send scans or photos or attachments of your food diary along with any pics of meal size, recipes and ingredients to me at sarah@eatthinkexplore.com and I'll get to work and provide you with a report and book in our chat about your first changes.

If you're doing the analysis yourself, the next pages are for you!

If you start doing this for yourself but think that maybe getting a professional's eye on them would make more sense I'm happy to help - drop me an email and we can discuss options (sarah@eatthinkexplore.com)

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Analysing your food diary

We're going to look at your food diary and analyse it for the following information:

- calories consumed
- calories burned
- Macro balance (protein vs fat vs carbohydrates)
- Meal variety
- Water intake
- Timing and fasting periods
- Eating habits and influences

Note that I'm generally assuming you've used My Fitness Pal to calculate the calories and macros in this guide.



Calculating calories in

I'm hoping that you've used My Fitness Pal or a similar tool to add your foods into as that calculates your calorie intake for you (provided you have included everything!). Have a look down the list. Are there any ingredients which surprise you in having a lot more or less calories than you thought they did?

I don't advocate counting calories, but I do think it's a good idea to have a rough idea of the calories in a food.

If you haven't, recipes often have an estimate of calories per portion, foods contain their calories on the packaging or can be looked up in Google if they come packaging free.

Most packaging records the calories for a serving and for 100g. You will need to consider whether you truly had a serving, or prorate the calories per 100g to what you ate. For example; if a food contains 50 calories in 100g, and you think you consumed about 150g then $50/100 \times 150 = 75$ calories.

Record these in an excel or google spreadsheet so it can total them for you. .



Calculating calories out

My Fitness Pal will calculate the calories burned during your specific exercises.

As well as specific exercise, your existence burns a lot of calories. There are many calculators online, but this one works pretty well <https://tdeecalculator.net/>. If you select the level of activity you have in your job, then you can add specific exercise on top to give your total calories burned.

Daily Energy Expenditure (based on weight and job activity)

+

calories burned during exercise

=

Total calories burned during that day



Calculating macros

Again, I hope you have done this in My Fitness Pal as calculating this from your foods yourself is a lot more complicated.

Have a look down the foods in My Fitness Pal and the split of the carbs, protein and fats that they contain. Are there any foods which surprise you?

There's a general feeling that a food is one macro i.e. bread and rice are carbs; eggs, cheese, meat and beans are protein; and cooking oils, avocados, full fat dairy and fatty meats are fats. (Do you know what vegetables are??). You will see that that is far from true however, and most foods contain some of each!

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Meal variety

Variety is the spice of life! I have no idea if that saying is true, but variety in your foods is certainly very beneficial for you.

When we consider that the average diet is heavily dependent on wheat, corn and rice, and that many of us eat the same meals every week, it's not surprising that our diversity has gone down (we think that our ancestors used to eat around 600 different plants a year!).

Have a count up. How many different vegetables and fruits did you eat during the week?

How many different plants (include each seasoning, grain etc)?

Did you manage to eat more than 5 portions of fruit and veg a day? That's about 80g of veg, fruit around the size of an apple and 25g of dried fruit or 150ml of fruit juice or smoothie. What was your average?

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Water intake

Whilst the 2l per day is not a hard and fast rule (it varies by weight, activity levels, ambient temperature etc.) it is still a good idea to ensure you are getting enough water as many of your body's processes will not function as well without it (skin, gut health and your brain to name a few).

So work out how much fluid you are getting each day. This does include juices, alcohol, teas and coffee, although we should be careful when only consuming caffeinated drinks and alcohol as these are all diuretics, and can actually cause your cells to become more dehydrated.

If you are not getting close to 2l across all beverages a day you would probably benefit from drinking more water.

If your levels are good in total, but most comes with caffeine or alcohol, consider swapping some out for purer forms of hydration. (also be aware that juices and smoothies contain a lot of sugar, and should be limited to 150ml a day - so don't replace with these!)



Timing and fasting periods

For this one we want to look at two things:

- 1) what is the biggest gap between meals?
- 2) How does your food intake sit within that eating period?

Non-eating period

This one is simple. For most people the longest break between meals is overnight whilst they sleep. So for each day work out how many hours fall between your last meal/snack or calorie containing drink and the first thing you eat or drink (water and calorie free drinks are excluded - remember milk is calories!).

For many people, this will be somewhere in the region of 10 hours.

It is generally accepted that a long break overnight is better for us, so try to make your overnight 'fast' last 12 hours. Or more if you want to try intermittent fasting - remember that you still eat the same calories, just in a shorter period.



Timing and fasting periods cont.

What does your food consumption look like?

This is about understanding. Ask yourself these questions:

- what time of day are you getting most of your calories (morning, afternoon, evening)?
- Are your eating times regular or does this vary a lot across different days?
- Do you graze (eat little and often most the day) or stick to three main meals?

Whilst the optimal eating pattern will vary by person, most of the guidance suggests that allowing your gut to rest between meals (not snacking/grazing), and eating more of your calories in the morning / at lunch and fewer in the evening are the best for your health.

What changes can you make to align yourself more closely with this?



Eating habits and influences

This is the really big bit. Try not to think about what you think your food habits are; let's just analyse the data and see what comes out. Then we can see if that fits.

Ask yourself these questions (and others along these lines) to help understand yourself:

- 1) are there foods that you eat following certain moods?
- 2) are there foods which you eat when you aren't hungry, or ones that you reach for when you're very hungry?
- 3) Are there any mood, location or environment triggers that occur before you eat sugary or fatty processed foods?
- 4) Are your mealtimes regular? Or do you skip some and snack instead (too busy for lunch for example)?
- 5) Which are the foods you get cravings for?
- 6) once you've started eating 'less healthy' foods, especially sugary ones, do you find yourself craving more for the rest of the day or are you satisfied?
- 7) Do you eat from boredom?
- 8) Is your diet better at work or at home?



Eating habits and influences cont.

9) Are there certain people that bring out the worst in your eating habits?

10) Do you find it impossible to resist food put out or offered by others?

Understanding that you do these things is the first step to being able to conquer them and gain control over your habits.

Solving any of these will vary by person, but here are some general tips:

- consider what the underlying reason for the behaviour is. are you seeking something? can you give it to yourself in another way?
- if you comfort eat or eat to reward yourself, think of other ways to make yourself feel happier or reward yourself that do not involve food.
- Try to set limits on when you start eating sugary foods (if they set you off on the blood sugar rollercoaster). When I was really bad at this I said no sugar till after lunch. That way, I was likely to pick a healthier lunch, and avoided sugary morning snacks, without feeling like I was depriving myself. Sometimes less is an ok step towards none!



Where to go from here

If you struggled with this or want to discuss breaking yourself out of your bad habits with support, reach out to me and we'll see how I can help pull the final pieces of this puzzle together.

Sarah@eatthinkexplore.com

I hope this helped.

Next step - working out your food goals...

