



## Keep Track of What You Eat

Research has shown that keeping track of what you eat is a powerful tool for changing eating habits and for weight management. Keeping food records helps people understand their eating habits. It can help them stick to their plan of when, what and how much to eat. Some people even find that they prefer not to eat something rather than bother to write it down.

Records give people the opportunity to look back and identify patterns in their eating. For instance, they might see that on days when they eat a piece of fruit or a yogurt in the afternoon, they eat a smaller dinner. They might be surprised to see how much soda they are drinking or how many snacks they have. People also might find patterns they would like to change. Instead of eating a cookie or muffin as usual, they could try eating half, or eat fruit instead.

Try the log on the following pages for a couple of weeks. To use this log:

1) Set a goal for the week. There are a lot of ways to use a goal. Use the same goal for a few weeks, or change every week. It could be about what you eat (for instance, I will eat 2 servings of vegetables a day), or how much you eat (for example, I will eat ½ cup of ice cream) or what times of day you eat (such as, I will not eat after 8 pm or I will eat breakfast.) Or, your goal might be to complete the food record for the entire week!

2) Write down everything you eat including beverages. Estimate how much you eat, and write down the time of day. For example, large coffee with low-fat milk, whole wheat bread two slices, butter 1 teaspoon, 10 am.)

3) Be honest! This is for YOU. There isn't a right or wrong way here.

4) Pay attention. At the end of the week, look back over your foods eaten, how much and when. Were there times when you ate more than you had planned to? Did this happen with particular foods or at certain times of day? Do you see repetition or patterns? Did you reach your goal?

5) Pay attention to your feelings, too. Some people also find it helpful to jot down how they were feeling when they ate something. This can help them see if their eating patterns are related to emotions or conditions like stress, fatigue, sadness, or anger.

There are different ways to keep food records. If you find that you don't keep up with this one or if you don't find it helpful, check [www.stepaheadprogram.com](http://www.stepaheadprogram.com) for other log options. One idea: Write down changes you would like to make in your eating habits, and then give yourself a check mark every time you do that. For example, if you are trying to eat whole grain instead of white breads and cereals, give yourself checkmarks for your whole-grain cereal and your sandwich on whole-grain bread.

