



## Nutrition Nibbles

### Oh Snap!

They say a picture is worth a thousand words but in my world, a photo could easily be worth one thousand calories. When meeting with clients who want to make positive dietary changes, it is helpful to identify areas that need improvement. I typically ask a person what he or she had to eat in the past 24 hours. The most typical response I receive? “Hmmm, let me see if I can remember.” It can be challenging, to say the least, to get a feel for a person’s overall style of eating if they cannot even recall what they had for lunch yesterday. Surely, this is why most people are puzzled that they do not seem to lose weight when they “don’t really eat too badly.” Really? How do you know what kind of eating habits you have or what dietary choices you make if you cannot name what meals you are cooking each week, what foods you are purchasing at the store, and how many times you are nibbling from the office candy dish each day? Enter the food journal.

Research shows that people who keep food journals lose twice as much weight as those who do not<sup>1</sup>. Food diaries are also helpful for improving food choices, highlighting nutrient deficiencies, identifying potential food allergies, and busting bad habits, such as eating when not hungry<sup>2</sup>. You think that with all the benefits that food journals provide, everyone would be keeping one. That is just not the case. While many of us have jotted down our daily intake at one point or another, either on a piece of paper, an online program, or a smart phone app, most of us give up after a few days or weeks. Why? While some are content to check out their choices and caloric content for a few days before moving on, most people discard food journaling because they get bored, it’s inconvenient, it is too time consuming, or they cannot find their food choices in the program’s database<sup>2</sup>. As a dietitian, my biggest challenge with clients keeping food journals is they usually track their intake sometime *after* they eat, often forgetting to log important details or entire food items! Due to this, it can be tricky to see how or what a person truly eats and how to help them. Enter the photo food journal.

More and more, I am recommending that people simply snap a picture with their smart phone of their meal, snack, or nibble before they consume it. Taking a photo does a few things: most obviously, it keeps a person from forgetting what he put in his mouth; it provides a pause before eating, allowing the person to decide if any modifications should be made; it allows a person to look back over the course of his day and see the bigger picture (i.e. are the meals well-rounded, is there enough produce, etc). Better than that, food photos provide a more accurate reflection of one’s diet. Think of how much better you “see” yourself in a particular outfit when you look at a picture of yourself in those clothes versus when you just look at yourself in the dressing room mirror. While more research needs to be conducted on photo food journaling, I am having luck with this technique in my practice. The biggest obstacle? Forgetting to take the photo first. My suggestion? Set smart phone reminders. You’ll get the hang of it the more often you snap those pics!

1. Kaiser Permanente. (2008, July 8). Keeping A Food Diary Doubles Diet Weight Loss, Study Suggests. ScienceDaily. Retrieved February 5, 2016 from [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/07/080708080738.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/07/080708080738.htm)

2. Felicia Cordeiro, Daniel A. Epstein, Edison Thomaz, Elizabeth Bales, Arvind K. Jagannathan, Gregory D. Abowd, James Fogarty. Barriers and Negative Nudges: Exploring Challenges in Food Journaling. CHI 2015. Retrieved February 5, 2016 from [http://www.depstein.net/pubs/fcordeiro\\_chi15.pdf](http://www.depstein.net/pubs/fcordeiro_chi15.pdf)