

ON TRACK WITH BARIX

Support to Keep You On Track With a Healthful Lifestyle

Mini Meals

Success strategies to keep your body running smoothly

What is a mini meal? A mini meal is a small, ¼ cup to 1 cup, healthy meal or snack. It contains a low-fat protein source along with healthy fat or carbohydrate. These small, frequent meals help you to keep your body running smoothly and reach your nutrition goals after surgery. Here are some of the benefits:

Blood Sugar Control. Six small, protein-rich meals help to keep blood sugar levels within a healthy range, minimizing peaks and valleys. The valleys, dips in blood sugar levels, cause the stress hormone cortisol to rise. A higher cortisol level can lead to cravings, increased belly fat, hormonal imbalance, and decreased immunity.

Blunted Reward System. Rewards are good, right? Not-so-much when it comes to food. When we eat larger meals or sweets, the brain releases chemicals that increase feelings of euphoria. Over time, we learn to see food as a reward and are more likely to reach for it when we're not hungry. Avoiding added sugars and eating smaller meals helps us to enjoy food and the emotions surrounding it in a moderate and controlled way.

Concentration and Mood. Mini meals fuel your body evenly so you're able to stay focused and calm. Waiting too long to eat crashes your blood sugar level and you feel irritable and agitated. Eating larger meals diverts blood to your gut to aid in digestion—leaving you feeling sleepy and unfocused.

Strategies to Incorporate Mini Meals

Portion right. The purpose of eating small frequent meals is to spread your intake throughout the day, not to increase the amount of food that you consume in a day. Being mindful of portion sizes is important. Keep portions to ¼ - 1 cup per meal by using smaller plates and bowls, and measure food occasionally so you can eye-ball portions more accurately.

Graze not. Eat every 2 ½ - 3 hours. Between meals, sip on calorie-free beverages—don't eat. You don't want to get into the habit of snacking your way through the day. Avoid pitfalls.

Choose healthy foods. The food you eat impacts your health and well-being. Build your diet on lean sources of protein—think lean fish, poultry and meat; dairy and legumes. Add in fresh vegetables and fruits. Balance with small amounts of whole grains. Move away from highly processed foods.



Balance convenience. The cost of convenience often shows up on the price tag. Life is busy and we can't always prep from scratch. Find the balance that works for you. If buying single serving cottage cheese means that you're more likely to put it in your lunch bag, then it may be worth the extra expense. Look for convenience foods with less processing and fewer additives. These are becoming more plentiful as food companies respond to consumers wanting to know what is in the food they are eating by simplifying ingredients.

Divide your protein intake. Rather than drinking a super-duper protein shake in the morning and then noshing on fruit, veggies and whole grains the rest of the day, divide your protein up into your meals and snacks. This doesn't have to be exact and it can change based on your meal plan for the day. Here's how it could look:

PROTEIN	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	DINNER	EA. SNACK (3)
60	14 grams	14 grams	14 grams	6 grams
75	18 grams	18 grams	18 grams	7 grams
90	22 grams	22 grams	22 grams	8 grams
110	26 grams	27 grams	27 grams	10 grams

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Start your day right. Don't skimp on breakfast. You need a good protein source at the start of your day. If you're in a rush a blended or ready-to-drink protein supplement, a glass of Fairlife milk, or Carnation Instant Breakfast will work. Eggs, egg sub, yogurt, or leftovers are protein-rich options. Bake up the following breakfast muffins, freeze and then heat up as needed for a savory breakfast treat.



Pack it. Take your snacks and lunch with you to insure you have healthy options at your fingertips throughout your work day. For lunch think sandwiches made with wraps, rolled deli meat, soups, a protein-topped salad, tuna and crackers, yogurt and fruit, or shrimp cocktail. Snacks could include light string cheese and apple slices, crackers and peanut butter, Babybel light cheese, cottage cheese, portion-controlled nuts, or veggies and hummus.

Get efficient. Rather than getting into the rut of eating out at dinnertime, become an efficiency rock star.

- Cook once and eat three times by repurposing food. Cook lean ground beef (or turkey) and mix it with marinara sauce to top spaghetti squash one night, season it for Mexican another night and make low-sugar sloppy Joes or shepherd's pie on night 3.
- Use a slow cooker and you'll have an easy meal ready when you walk in the door.
- Keep the ingredients on hand for two or more family favorites. It'll be easier to resist the draw of eating out.



Prepare for the unexpected. Keep protein bars, portion-controlled nuts, ready-to-drink protein shakes or other convenient foods on hand for the times when healthy options are not available. Life happens—be prepared.

Plan Ahead. All of this does require that you set aside a little time each week to plan out meals and snacks, stock up on health foods and pack your lunch/snacks the night before. It's well worth your investment of time and energy to insure that you're prepared to eat healthy.

Taco Lettuce Cups

- 1 lb. lean ground beef (95% lean)
- 1 package taco seasoning, low sodium
- 1/2 c. shredded Cheddar
- 8 large lettuce leaves, rinsed and dried
- 1 avocado, chopped
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 cup fresh salsa

Cook ground beef in large non-stick skillet. Follow instructions on taco seasoning. Serve taco meat in lettuce cups. Garnish with cheddar, onion, avocado and salsa. Makes 8 servings.

NUTRITION INFORMATION PER SERVING: 249 calories, 14 grams protein, 8 grams fat, 11 grams carbohydrate, 377 mg sodium.

Recipes

Southwestern Egg Muffins

Freezer tip: wrap these muffins individually in plastic wrap and freeze. To warm, take off the plastic wrap and microwave for one to two minutes, until warm.

- 1 lb. lean ground beef (95% lean), cooked and drained
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne red pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/2 orange or red bell pepper, diced
- 12 large eggs
- 1 cup fresh spinach, finely chopped
- 2 green onions, diced
- 1 cup sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- Pinch of salt & freshly ground pepper

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Spray 18 muffin tins with non-stick spray and set aside. Mix together the cooked ground beef, cumin, cayenne red pepper, chili powder, spinach, green onion and 1/2 cup of shredded cheese in a large mixing bowl.

In another large bowl whisk the eggs, season with a pinch of salt and pepper and add to the beef mixture. Stirring until fully combined. Pour mixture into muffin tins (about 3/4 full) and sprinkle with remaining shredded cheese.

Bake for 20–25 minutes until the egg muffins are set in the middle and begin to turn golden brown. Remove from the oven and let cool before removing from the muffin tin.

Refrigerate the egg muffins for up to a week in an airtight container or wrap individually in plastic wrap and freeze—remove plastic wrap and microwave for 2 minutes when you're ready to eat. Makes 18 muffins.

NUTRITION INFORMATION PER MUFFIN: 112 calories, 11 grams protein, 6 grams fat, 1 gram carbohydrate, 98 mg sodium.

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Recipes

Spaghetti Squash and Meat Sauce

- 1 spaghetti squash
- 1 lb. lean ground beef (95% lean)
- 1 onion, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 small green bell pepper, diced
- 1 (28 ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 1 (16 ounce) can tomato sauce, no added salt
- 1 (6 ounce) can tomato paste
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Poke holes in the squash with a fork and place on a baking sheet. Bake for 30 minutes, turn and continue baking another 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool for 10 minutes. Slice it horizontally, and scoop out the seeds and pulp. Separate strands with a fork. If the squash is not completely done, strands don't separate easily, it can be placed back in the oven, open-faced, and baked for an additional 10-20 minutes.

While the squash is baking, combine ground beef, onion, garlic, and green pepper in a large saucepan. Cook and stir until meat is brown and vegetables are tender. Drain grease.

Stir diced tomatoes, tomato sauce, and tomato paste and seasonings into the pan. Simmer for 1 hour, stirring occasionally. Spoon over spaghetti squash and sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese. Makes 8 servings.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION PER SERVING: 172 calories, 20 grams protein, 3 grams fat, 20 grams carbohydrate, 268 mg sodium.



Sloppy Joes

- 1 lb. lean ground beef (95% lean)
- 8 ounces tomato sauce
- 1/2 cup ketchup, no added sugar
- 1/4 cup Splenda or like sweetener
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon prepared mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon onion powder
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Hamburger buns (optional)
- Sliced pickles (optional)

Cook ground beef in a large pot over medium/medium high heat; stirring and breaking apart as meat cooks. Cook until no longer pink, drain fat.

In a medium bowl, mix together tomato sauce, ketchup, sweetener, Worcestershire sauce, mustard, garlic powder, onion powder, and freshly ground black pepper. Pour tomato mixture over browned meat, stir, and simmer until heated. Serve on hamburger buns and sliced pickles if desired. Makes 8 servings.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION PER SERVING: 107 calories, 13 grams protein, 2 grams fat, 7 grams carbohydrate, 248 mg sodium.

