



---

## One big meal versus many small meals a day

### Question

Dear Alice,

I've started counting calories in order to lose weight, and I've lost ten pounds in six months, so I'm positive that counting calories works. Recently I've started to eat one big meal (about 1400 calories) a day. Is this healthy? Will I continue to lose weight?

### Answer

Dear Reader,

It seems everywhere we turn someone is sharing a new strategy or trick for shedding pounds. It's hard to know what's effective and healthy. Research shows that eating one big meal a day instead of several small meals is not likely to aid in weight loss and could lead to serious health problems. Various studies have examined the connections between eating patterns and obesity. Even with the same number of calories, people who ate fewer times per day were actually at a higher risk of becoming obese. People who skipped breakfast in particular were more likely to be overweight. Scientists believe skipping breakfast may lead people to crave more calorie-dense foods later in the day. As a result, those who skip meals may eat more when they do eat than they would otherwise.

There are several possible explanations for the connection between less-frequent eating and the tendency to gain weight. One is that infrequent eating increases blood insulin levels. When there is a lot of insulin in the blood, fat is more likely to be stored than digested, so higher insulin levels may impact body weight. The relationship between obesity and infrequent eating may also be a result of how the body processes fat and glucose, depending on whether you are physically active after you eat. For example, if you only eat one big meal in the evening then go right to bed, your body may store glucose as fat rather than burning it as fuel.

Aside from gaining or losing weight, eating only one meal a day can have dangerous health consequences. Consuming large, infrequent meals taxes the body's metabolic system. It promotes high blood cholesterol levels and insulin resistance. High cholesterol is closely linked to heart disease and high blood pressure. Insulin is a hormone involved in the metabolism of sugar and fat. When the body becomes "resistant" to insulin, it means it can't use its own insulin properly for digestion. Insulin resistance can lead to type II diabetes.

If you are trying to lose weight, eating more frequent, smaller meals may cause the stomach to shrink over time, leading you to feel fuller after consuming less food. Instead of counting calories, you may want to focus on a healthy diet and regular exercise. Whole grains, beans, fruit, and vegetables provide greater feelings of fullness per calorie than processed foods. These high-fiber foods add bulk to your meal enabling you to lose weight without constantly battling hunger. Eating at home, rather than in restaurants may also help you eat healthier foods and more reasonable portions. Another suggestion is to focus on eating only when hungry, rather than out of boredom or habit. The one time it may be key to eat even if you're not hungry is breakfast.

Finally, getting at least 30 minutes of vigorous cardiovascular exercise or strength training on most days will rev

Header: 2

your metabolism and help keep your body healthy. It's great to be aware of your health, and try to maintain a healthy body weight. Multiple, small, healthy meals seem to be a better bet than one big meal in terms of weight loss and overall health.

Health topic

Nutrition & Physical Activity

Weight Gain & Loss

---

**Source URL:** *:///answered-questions/one-big-meal-versus-many-small-meals-day*

**List of links present in page**

- *:///answered-questions/one-big-meal-versus-many-small-meals-day*
- *:///category/nutrition-physical-activity*
- *:///category/weight-gain-loss*
- *:///node/18301/printable/print*