

Beat the cheat

...OR HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO!

By Lila Bruk, Registered Dietician

It is well-known that trying to overly restrict your eating will only cause you to binge on all those foods you've been depriving yourself of – and lots of it!

It is for this reason that Cheat Meals or Days exist – an opportunity to indulge in all those forbidden goodies guilt-free. However, how can you cheat healthily, indulge your craving, but not blow all the hard work you have already achieved? The answers lie below...

Why cheat?

As mentioned previously, overly-restrictive diets only lead you to crave all the foods you've denied yourself even more. Therefore, by allowing yourself to have a little bit of those foods you enjoy, it makes it easier to stay on track and prevents you from bingeing on these foods a little way down the line. In other words, it makes your eating plan more sustainable in the long-term and prevents you from such dreaded afflictions as dessert-deprivation and waffle-withdrawal!

The 80/20 rule

In order to achieve your weight and fitness goals, you basically need to eat healthily about 80% of the time, which leaves another 20% for you to be a bit more lenient. Therefore, if you schedule in one or two Cheat Meals, it shouldn't affect your progress too dramatically.



Cheat day vs cheat meal

Many people swear by a Cheat Day – one full day out of the week that you are free to indulge in all those yummy treats from which you usually steer clear. Nothing is off-limits – from the greasiest takeaway to the richest cakes to the biggest packet of crisps. However, do you ever find that at the end of your Cheat Day you're left feeling bloated, nauseous and uncomfortable? Do you

perhaps even feel depressed at the thought that you've got to wait another whole week before you taste chocolate again? If this happens to you, it may be wise to consider a Cheat Meal rather than a Cheat Day. In other words, you will still plan in advance when you are going to have your cheat, but you are limiting it to one meal per week. In this way, you are still allowing yourself a treat, but without going so overboard that you end up feeling ill. Also, by

having just a Cheat Meal, it also makes it easier to get back on track with your regular eating plan. You may even decide to plan in a second Cheat Meal for another time during the week, which can further help to prevent you from feeling deprived and make it easier to stick to your plan. Whether you choose to have a Cheat Meal or a Cheat Day, either way, try not to undo all your hard work by going completely overboard.

at home

Watch the size of your dinner plates

When trying to reduce one's portion sizes, it can be disheartening and demotivating to see one's meal lost in the middle of a large plate. By choosing smaller plates, it makes you feel that you are eating more and that your portion sizes are not that much smaller. This is particularly useful when you're having a small quantity of your favourite cheat food, as it makes the meal last longer and seem more substantial. Try eating your dinner off a side plate, or even eating your breakfast cereal with a teaspoon. It sounds crazy, but it works!

Out of sight, out of mind

Keep your cheat food out of your direct line of vision, because it will be much harder to resist if you see it every time you open the fridge or the kitchen cupboard. So, rather keep it tucked away on the top shelf, or buried at the back of the freezer.



when eating out:

Don't go hungry

Make sure that before you go to your restaurant you have a light snack. This is especially important if you are going to be going in a big group and it is likely you will only be eating very late. In this way, you will find it easier to make healthier choices and will be less likely to overindulge.

Order 2 starters

Restaurant portions are often so large that one can quite easily get away by ordering 2 starters instead of a starter and a main.

Get a doggy bag

Or alternatively, if you order a main dish and it turns out to be huge, you can ask for half of it to be put into a doggy bag. Not only will you save on calories, but you've also already got lunch for tomorrow sorted!

Avoid "all you can eat" offers

It may be tempting and recession-friendly to take advantage of that "all you can eat" sushi night at your favourite Japanese restaurant, but just

because it's "all you can eat", doesn't mean it's "all you should eat". Chances are you will end up eating way more than you intended to, or than your body needed.

Beware of fast food

Yes, we probably don't need to tell you this, but fast food is a minefield of calories, fat and salt. Even a medium serving of hot chips could equate to as much as 20g of fat, which is equivalent to 4 teaspoons of oil and that's not even including the mayo you dip your chips into! If you must go the fast food route,



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try to make healthier choices, such as grilled chicken or fish with lots of salad.

Avoid words relating to big quantities e.g. Large, jumbo

You may be tempted, once again, by value for money or you may simply feel really hungry. Either way, suppress the urge to order the biggest size simply because it's available – whether it's a muffin, latte or steak, you'll probably find the smaller size will suffice.



The salad fat-trap

This brings us onto our next point. Even if you go the saintly route and load up your plate with salad, this won't get you very far if you then drown your salad in rich, creamy, high-fat salad dressings. In fact, some dressings are so high in fat, that you'd probably be better off with your burger! So, always ask for your dressings on the side and then make sure you use it as sparingly as possible. One way to do this is rather than pouring the dressing over the salad, try dipping your fork into the

dressing before spearing some greens to ensure just the right amount of dressing. Or, even better, go the olive oil, lemon juice and



balsamic vinegar route instead of creamy dressings so as to get some good healthy fats.

Watch out for pasta

Pasta is a tricky dish. You need to eat a lot of it to feel full, but in the process you've blown your calorie, carbs and – if you chose a creamy sauce – fat budget for the day! If you must indulge in this Italian delight, choose a tomato-based sauce that's loaded with veggies, keep the parmesan to a minimum, get a half portion and share it with your dining partner. In other words, have it as an accompaniment to your main meal, rather than the meal itself. You still get to enjoy your pasta, but in a portion-friendly way.

Healthy desserts – yes, it's possible!

Indulge your sweet tooth, but keep your waistline in check by sharing it with your dining partner. Also, try to choose desserts that are fruit-based or sorbets, rather than creamy, rich options.

Make healthier choices

You can have your Cheat Meal, but make it slightly healthier so that you still satisfy your cravings and feel good about your food choices afterwards. In the table on the following page, you will find your favourite cheat foods and ways to make them healthier:



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Beating the cheat...

The cheat food you crave	How to make it healthier	... or even better
Large serving of hot chips (approx 50 chips): 600 calories & 35g fat	Steal about 10 chips from your dining partner: 130 calories & 7g fat	3 boiled baby potatoes: 90 calories and 0.1g fat
350ml berry smoothie 430 calories & 14g fat	350ml orange juice: 168 calories & 1g fat	Share your orange juice with your dining partner (180ml): 84 calories and 0.5g fat
A large (approx 180g) blueberry muffin: 500 calories & 12g fat	A small (approx 80g) blueberry muffin: 230 calories & 5g fat	Slice low GI bread spread with 1 tsp nut butter and 1 tbsp jam 180 calories and 5g fat
500g steak: Approx 1200 calories & 75g fat	180g steak: Approx 480 calories & 30g fat	180g Tuna steak: Approx 300 calories & 13g fat
1 cup regular toasted muesli: Approx 450 calories & 8g fat	1 cup low fat low GI muesli: 350 calories & 3g fat	1 cup bran flakes: 160 calories and 1.5g fat
Fettucine Alfredo: Approx 800 calories & 40g fat	Spaghetti arrabiatta: 500 calories & 20g fat	Share your veggie pasta & have it as a side dish: Approx 300 calories and 15g fat
1 regular-sized pizza with extra cheese and sausage: 800 calories & 40g fat	Two slices pizza with extra cheese and sausage: 500 calories & 18g fat	2 slices thin crust pizza with ½ regular cheese & extra veg: 300 calories and 10g fat
Large slice cheesecake: 460 calories & 20g fat	1 slice swiss roll: 150 calories & 2.3g fat	3 Wholewheat crackers spread & 2 tbsp fat-free cottage cheese & 2 tsp reduced sugar jam: 460 calories & 20g fat
Ice cream sundae: 900 calories & 35g fat	1 scoop ice cream: 150 calories & 6g fat	1 scoop low-fat frozen yoghurt: 130 calories and 3g fat
Large box popcorn with butter: 600 calories & 40g fat	Large box popcorn, no butter: 400 calories & 10g fat	2 cups homemade air-popped popcorn: 130 calories and 6g of fat
1 large brownie: 350 calories & 45g fat	1 small piece of brownie: 120 calories & 5g fat	2 small chocolate biscuits: 95 calories and 5g fat
1 slab of milk chocolate: 550 calories & 40g fat	25g mini-slab: 145 calories & 11g fat	1 cup fresh strawberries lightly drizzled with melted chocolate: 100 calories and 5g fat
Margarita (240ml): 350 calories & 0g fat	350ml beer: 145 calories & 0g fat	Double whiskey on the rocks or small (150ml) glass of wine: 105 calories and 0g fat
45g deep-fried Camembert: 260 calories and 18g fat	45g Cheddar Cheese: 170 calories & 14g fat	45g of reduced fat cheddar cheese: 90 calories and 4g fat



The day after...

Many people find it hard to get back on track the day after a Cheat Day or Meal. Make it easier for yourself, by going straight back on your plan and taking it one healthy meal at a time. Try to fit in a longer or more intense workout, which

can also help your motivation to be renewed. Lastly, if you feel guilty about what you ate for your cheat, remember that this is not something you do daily and that the majority of the time you eat cleanly.



... AND MOST IMPORTANTLY

Regardless of what you choose as your cheat foods, make sure you enjoy them, relish them and savour every bite. You deserve it!