

Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

Issue 15 April 2006

Hi Everyone!

Do you often find yourself out and about feeling hungry and pressured into calling in at a fast food store or buying a chocolate bar to tide you over? Eating frequently can be beneficial to keep the metabolic rate elevated and keep blood glucose levels stable however choosing the wrong snacks can lead to weight gain and rapid rise in blood glucose levels.

I'd like to explain what the glycemic index means. We hear about the GI rating on foods but do you know what this means?

The GI (glycemic index) ranks foods according to their impact on blood glucose (sugar) levels. Foods ranked as high GI are absorbed quickly causing a rapid rise in blood glucose levels. A rapid rise in blood glucose may be followed by a rapid drop. When blood glucose levels get too low (hypoglycaemia) we can feel tired, dizzy and generally unwell. Foods ranked low GI break down more slowly over time and keep blood glucose levels stable. Keeping blood glucose levels stable means that we have plenty of readily available fuel for the brain and muscles.

Low glycemic snacks can help you feel full and prevent you from overeating during the day. It's a good idea to carry suitable snacks around with you so they are immediately on hand when needed. If you have a nutritious snack on hand you will not be tempted to buy less nutritious take away snacks such as biscuits, cakes and confectionery. Examples of low glycemic snacks include apples, pears, carrots, low-fat yoghurt, skim milk and multigrain bread. Breads vary considerably; buckwheat is rated low, rye medium and whole meal wheat is high. Bananas have a medium GI and some nuts such as almonds and walnuts have a zero rating. Remember, just because a food is "low fat" doesn't mean you can eat twice as much. The total amount of food you eat must be in balance with the amount of energy you burn.

Eating frequent small meals can raise your metabolic rate, increasing the total amount of energy expenditure. If your body goes without food for a while, your metabolism slows down as it thinks it is going into starvation. This means it will burn less energy. This can become a problem for frequent dieters who try and starve themselves. They can end up with an extremely low metabolic rate, which makes them gain weight more quickly when they return to eating.

So don't leave home without a healthy snack handy, then you will never feel tempted to buy junk food to quell those hunger pangs.

Have a safe and happy Easter break! Keep active!
Yours in health,

Jeni