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**H e a l t h  
P r o m o t i o n  
& W e l l n e s s**  
at MIT Medical

## **Midnight Mini-Meals**

### **Late Night Eating**

A lot of students are under the impression that eating late at night (i.e. after 8 pm) is “bad” and contributes to weight gain. After all, “you’re not burning those calories while you sleep, so anything you eat late at night gets directly stored as fat on you abs, butt, hips, and thighs.” This is NOT necessarily true!

Your body burns calories 24-7. (It’s true that you burn fewer calories when you’re sleeping than when you’re awake, but adequate sleep also helps your body’s biochemistry to maintain optimal weight and not gain weight.) It’s the total amount of calories you eat (vs. burn) in a given day that matters most; not the time of day you eat those calories. In other words, if you eat a dozen Krispy Kreme donuts (in addition to your usual daily food intake), it doesn’t matter if you eat them at 7 in the morning, 3 in the afternoon, or 10 at night. Any extra calories above what you need, consumed at ANY time of the day, may be stored as body fat.

You need to refuel at least every 4-5 hours. In college, you probably get up later and stay up much later than the average person with a 9 am to 5 pm work schedule. If dinner was at 6 pm and bed is not until 2:00 am, you definitely need to eat again around 10 or 11. That late-night snack will not turn to fat unless...you eat too much over the course of the whole day.

To avoid the pitfalls of late night snacking, keep these tips in mind...

#### **1. HALT before you snack.**

Before you decide to snack late at night, ask yourself “Am I physically **H**ungry?” If so, you should directly proceed to tip #2. On the other hand, if you just ate dinner and you are not physically hungry, ask yourself “what is really going on that is making my desire to snack so high right now?” Is it simply out of **H**abit? Is it that you’re feeling **A**nxious, **A**ngry or over-whelmed, **L**onely or depressed, **T**ired or bored? If you eat for any of these non-hunger reasons, you’re likely eating more calories than your body needs, and these calories may be stored as fat.

#### **2. Chose smart, and portion it out.**

Unfortunately, in the late hours of the night (or the wee hours of the morning), you are often at the mercy of vending machines, pizza delivery, or 24-hour

*Adapted from UCLA’s Student Nutrition Action Committee:*

<http://www.snac.ucla.edu/>

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convenience store snacks. Even though there are nutritious options available at LaVerde's, we tend to make the worst choices when we are over-tired and overly hungry. Many of these "convenience" snacks are high in fat and sugar and low in nutrition; munching on them all night can often contribute to feeling bad physically and emotionally.

Instead, think meal foods rather than snack foods. Your late night eating should be more like a "midnight mini-meal" (with a definite start and finish), rather than an endless eating frenzy.

Another benefit of meal foods vs. traditional snack foods is that they tend to have some protein in them. Protein is much more satiating (or filling) than sugary or starchy foods; so you'll be less likely to raid the kitchen or vending machine again an hour after eating them. Protein also does a better job of keeping you more alert, which makes it an ideal choice for late night study sessions.

Try these midnight mini meal ideas:

- One small box of whole grain cereal with fat free or 1% low fat milk
- One carton of low fat yogurt sprinkled with high fiber cereal
- A small dish of low fat cottage cheese and canned or fresh fruit
- One string cheese and a piece of fresh fruit
- A small cup of edamame (boiled soybeans)
- One handful of your favorite nuts (peanuts, almonds, cashews, pistachios...)
- A small whole wheat pita spread with hummus
- ½ of a turkey sandwich
- A small 3oz. can of tuna with 4-6 low fat crackers
- 2 rice cakes spread with natural peanut butter
- Apple slices or celery sticks with natural peanut butter
- Sports bar with 10+ grams of protein (avoid those with high amounts of saturated fat or hydrogenated vegetable oils)
- English muffin pizza with canned tomato sauce and low fat mozzarella cheese
- Low fat frozen dinner (< 300 calories)
- Canned tomato or broth-based soup, or dehydrated bean soup.
- A small tortilla filled with salsa and a little low fat grated cheese or mashed beans

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