



Meal replacement shakes for 'eating on the go'

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Introduction

Following a balanced diet is essential for maintaining overall health, even between the hustle and bustle of everyday life. However, healthy eating and 'on the go' are two things that don't tend to go together. Our busy lifestyles can prevent us from making the correct food choices, especially while travelling. Packing healthy snacks can promote healthy eating on the road. Furthermore, supplement or meal replacement shakes provide a practical and healthful way of meeting nutrient requirements and maintaining a healthy weight for people always 'on the go'.

Nutritional requirements

In basic terms, a good diet should be rich in variety and contain all nutrients essential for overall health. Furthermore, the foods that we consume should contribute to maintaining a healthy body weight. Dietary choices in South Africa do not reflect a healthy diet, and poor nutritional status has become a national issue. Travelling or not, our bodies need a constant supply of energy and nutrients to remain functional and avoid illness. Following a diet containing all essential food groups can help to achieve this.

Energy foods

Energy foods, or 'macronutrients', include carbohydrates, fats and proteins. Although each performs different functions, they all contain calories that can be broken down for energy. Overconsumption of calories, coupled with minimal physical activity, will result in weight gain. This can lead to overweight and various lifestyle diseases. Similarly, consuming too few calories can cause weight loss and affect body function and immunity. Achieving a balance of calorie intake and energy usage is essential for achieving a healthy weight.

Carbohydrates are the body's preferred energy source and should constitute between 45% to 60% of total dietary calories. Carbohydrates help to maintain blood sugar and prevent the breakdown of muscle. We should choose healthier forms of carbohydrates that are rich in fibre. Complex carbohydrates like wholegrains, vegetables and fruit should take preference over sugar and syrups. Dietary fat is also essential to our diets. In addition to helping with the absorption of vitamins, fat is required to maintain certain structures in the body, like skin. Fat should form between 20–35% of total daily intake. Unsaturated or 'good' fats should take preference over 'bad' or saturated fats. Choose liquid, plant-based oils such as canola or olive oil, rather than solid, animal-derived fats. Lastly, protein should constitute between 10% and 35% of calorie intake. Protein is essential for cellular growth and repair, as well as immune system function. Protein sourced from lean meats, low-fat dairy and legumes is recommended.

Micronutrients

Vitamins and minerals are micronutrients needed by the body in small amounts. Each one performs an essential role, whether it be promoting immune function, or helping the body metabolise energy foods. Micronutrient deficiencies can cause significant health problems and are prevalent in South Africa. Incredibly low intakes of fruit, vegetables and dairy are the main causes of this. Consuming a variety of foods is usually enough to meet the body's micronutrient requirements. However, in cases where nutrient needs are increased, supplementation may be beneficial.

Eating on the go!

Today, we do not always have the luxury of sitting down at a table and eating a balanced meal three times a day. Instead, we eat on the run, where take-aways and drive-throughs become more convenient options. Too little time for planning, preparing, and cooking healthy foods prevents us from making good dietary choices. The consequences of these habits have become evident in recent years. The rates of overweight and obesity in South Africa have increased dramatically. Statistics show that 70% of South African females and 40% of South African males are overweight or obese. Furthermore, 43% of deaths are attributed to obesity-related diseases such

as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and various cancers. The food environment is a noteworthy culprit in the obesity epidemic. If we have constant access to unhealthy, fast foods, we are more likely to make poor food choices. This is especially true during travel or when pressed for time.

Although it is challenging to follow good eating habits while travelling, it can be done. Being able to identify healthy from non-healthy foods is the first step to adopting a better diet. Furthermore, being aware of the implications of making poor dietary choices should motivate people to choose healthy snacks and meals. Meal replacement shakes may be valuable for achieving good nutrition 'on-the-go'.

Healthy snacks

Instead of laying waste to the mountains of chips, cookies, sweets and cooldrinks along the way to your destination, pack your own snacks! Quick, easy, and healthy snacks can help to curb the on-road munchies and promote healthful eating. Air-popped popcorn, biltong, raw fruits and vegetable, wholegrain cheese sandwiches and some ice-cold water would make fine additions to the traveller's snack bag.

Meal replacement shakes

In addition to healthy snacks, meal replacement shakes offer a healthy and practical substitute for meals while on the road. Pre-made shakes or even a flask of water/milk to mix with the shake when you are ready may be a convenient way of ensuring a healthier option to energy-dense take-aways. Meal replacement shakes are portion-controlled, making it easier to control the daily calorie intake. A good supplement shake should provide optimal amounts of carbohydrates, protein, and fat. It should contain fibre and be low in saturated fats and simple sugars. Vitamin and minerals should

also form part of the shake formulation. This will help people reach the recommended daily intake for essential micronutrients. It is important to note that not all supplement/meal replacement shakes are suitable for all people. It is advised to consult a dietitian before deciding to use a supplement.

Conclusion

A good diet is essential for health, as well as the maintenance of a healthy body weight. Overweight and micronutrient deficiencies remain a problem in South Africa. This is mostly due to poor dietary decisions. Frequent travelling and a busy lifestyle can make it difficult to follow healthy eating habits. Planning and packing snacks before travelling can help prevent the consumption of unhealthy food while on the road. Meal replacement shakes are useful for travelling as they are easy to make and contribute to a healthy diet.

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