What type of eater are you?

The Restrictor. Someone who eats far too few servings from most (if not all) of the food groups in an effort to control weight. Total calorie intake is often less than 1200-1500 calories a day. This calorie level may be appropriate for older, sedentary, obese adults who need to reduce weight. But, it is NOT appropriate for healthy, active college students who are striving for optimal energy and fitness. Reducing calories too low often results in poor concentration, fatigue, depression, multiple nutrient deficiencies, reduced metabolism and lean muscle mass, food preoccupation, and in women, amenorrhea (no menstrual periods) and bone loss.

The Fat-free Fan. Someone who avoids fat completely, often restricting fat grams to less than 20 grams daily, believing that this is the best strategy for optimal weight control and health. Total calorie intake may or may not be adequate depending on whether or not the person makes up the fat calories with more carbohydrate-rich foods. Restricting fat intake too low often results in poor satiety and increased sugar cravings, depression, hair loss, dry skin, and deficiencies of essential fatty acids and fat-soluble vitamins.

The Protein-Pumper (and Carbo Cutter). Someone who restricts carbohydrates and pumps up protein intake (often with supplemental protein powders, drinks, bars and/or amino acid pills), believing that this is the best strategy to lose body fat and/or build lean muscle mass. Contrary to popular belief, carbohydrates do not make you fat; too many calories make you fat! Inadequate carbohydrates will leave you feeling tired and weak in your work-outs, as well as in your daily activities. Adequate protein is important for muscle building, but excess is not necessary or healthy. Resistance training and increased calories are key to gaining muscle mass. Most people (even vegetarian body builders) can meet their higher protein needs with normal foods.

The Junk Food Junkie. Someone who thrives on fast, convenient, fatty, flavorful foods with little regard to nutrient quality or calorie density. Intakes of total calories, unhealthful saturated fat, and salt are usually too high; while dietary fiber and disease-fighting antioxidants and phytonutrients from vegetables, fruits, and whole grains are terribly lacking. These people are at high risk for weight gain, as well as heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and diverticulosis.

The Overeater. Someone who may or may not choose healthy foods, but who regularly consumes large quantities. Overeating may result from lack of knowledge of portion sizes, or it can result from family, social, or cultural pressures to eat. Some people overeat because they fail to hear and/or respond to their bodies’ fullness cues. This may happen if you eat too fast, suffer from the “clean-your-plate” syndrome, or have been on multiple diets where favorite foods were restricted. Overeating may also occur when food is used to cope with stress, depression, boredom, loneliness, or other emotions. Some overeaters experience terrible guilt and distress after over eating, which may lead to drastic measures such as throwing up, taking laxatives, using diet pills, fasting, and/or exercising excessively – which can all cause devastating health effects!

The Sensible Eater. Someone who lets the Food Guide Pyramid guide his/her choices. Emphasis is placed on foods with the highest nutrient quality (like fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, lean poultry and fish, low fat milk products, nuts and unsaturated oils). But, sweets and high fat foods are also enjoyed in moderation, and without guilt! These people sometimes eat too much and sometimes eat too little as a result of environmental influences. But most of the time, they listen to their body’s internal cues for hunger and fullness and maintain a proper energy balance.

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