

Regular Eating

Establishing a regular eating pattern is an important part of nutritional recovery for those engaging in disordered eating behaviours, including those who restrict their intake, have lost an understanding of hunger and satiety, engage in non-hungry eating or binge eating.

Regular eating is the foundation of structured eating. It is a base from which to work towards a positive relationship with food. Sometimes referred to as 'The 3 Hour Rule' which encourages the person to eat 3 main meals, 3 snacks, no more than 3 hours apart, and makes an explicit requirement not to eat at other times. The benefits of regular eating include increased metabolism, stable blood sugar, decreased binge eating, stable weight as well as normal functioning of hunger and fullness signals, digestive muscles and bowels.

Below are some strategies that may help to establish regular eating:

Plan Ahead

Planning ahead is a great strategy to ensure regular eating is practiced. Different methods for planning ahead include meal prepping, making daily plans and setting an alarm for meal times.

Meal Prep

Meal prep is one of the best ways to ensure that you are sticking to your regular eating schedule, while also allowing ample time to participate in everyday life. Meal prepping involves making all of your food for the week ahead of time, for example on a Sunday afternoon, so that it is all ready for the week ahead. Making your food in advance allows a lot of time to spend grocery shopping and choosing different foods that can be eaten across the whole week, so that meal time does not feel monotonous. Eating a variety of different foods is really important, so meal prepping is a great way to ensure that there is variety in your weekly meals.

Daily Plans

Having a daily plan is a great way to know what will be happening at designated meal times and what to eat. Daily plans are an important tool for regular eating, but it is important that they remain flexible, in case circumstances arise that prevent eating at a designated time or prevent eating a planned meal.

Setting Alarms

Setting alarms for meals is a really easy way to make sure meals are eaten at the right time and meals are not skipped. This can be done on your phone so that they

can't be avoided or forgotten. It can also be done on a clock or a computer. Alarms are a really simple and easy tool to support regular eating.

Flexibility

Sometimes there will be extraneous circumstances that cannot be controlled, that prevent eating at a designated time or may delay meals. In order to compensate for this, it is a good idea to be flexible with your regular meals. A great way to be flexible is to carry around a snack in case you are stuck somewhere and want to eat your meal exactly on time. Another way is to delay your next meal – but you should not make the breaks between meals more than four hours.

Need some additional support establishing regular eating?

Contact your GP for a referral to a practitioner with specialised knowledge in health, nutrition and eating disorders such as a dietitian or psychologist.