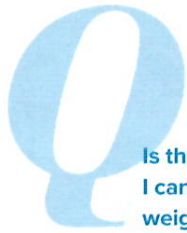


Wendy Haaf answers your questions about health, nutrition, and well-being



Is there anything I can do to gain weight safely?



If you haven't spoken with your doctor about ruling out any medical problems that could be causing you to remain underweight or to lose weight unintentionally, that's where you should begin, because conditions such as thyroid disease, diabetes, and celiac disease can result in weight loss. If you're over 70, it's even more important to see your primary care provider, since even in the absence of a health problem, "we know that people over 70 who lose weight tend to have bad outcomes, such as ending up in the hospital or falling," explains Heather Keller, a professor of kinesiology at the University of Waterloo (ON) and the Schlegel Research Chair in Nutrition and Aging with the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging.

And don't simply write the problem off to the fact that you simply don't feel like eating, since that, too, warrants further probing to address the underlying cause—depression being one possibility. "Low appetite is not normal for adults," Keller stresses.

With that out of the way, here are some strategies that can help add wanted kilos in as healthy a way as possible. (A registered dietitian can provide expert advice tailored to your individual tastes and nutritional needs. To find one in your area, visit unlockfood.ca.)

Make meals more special. "Eating with others, eating in pleasant surroundings, and trying to make a meal an event so you're interested in eating is key," Keller says. For example, you might try tucking in while watching your favourite show, or invite a neighbour over to share a meal. And if you're not crazy about cooking, maybe you can cut down on food prep by joining a community kitchen, sharing kitchen duties with a friend, or trying out a meal-kit delivery service.

Sharpen your appetite. If you have a poor appetite,



eating when you feel a bit more hungry and spreading out your food intake can help increase your appetite over time. "Eating smaller amounts more frequently can increase your food intake without making you feel overfull or stuffed," says Marg

Alfieri, a registered dietitian and associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine at McMaster University in Hamilton, ON. "Snacks can be your friend," she adds.

Maintain (or gain) muscle mass. As we age, we have to work harder to keep our muscles from wasting, namely, by exercising and eating enough protein. (The minimum recommended amount for sedentary adults is 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight each day, though many experts believe older people need even more: 1.2 grams per kilogram.) It's also a good idea to distribute protein intake throughout the day, since if you consume too much at one sitting, your body may not be able to absorb it all. Healthy high-protein foods that can easily be incorporated into meals and snacks include nuts, cheese, Greek yogourt, and legumes. "If you're going to have veggies and dip, try hummus," Alfieri suggests, "or use Greek yogourt to make a ranch dip."

Add healthy calorie-dense foods. Many high-protein foods, such as nuts and cheese, are also high in calories. So are fats, so try eating more foods containing the heart-healthy types, such as nuts, avocados, and olive oil. "If you're having salad, make a vinaigrette using $\frac{3}{4}$ olive oil and only $\frac{1}{4}$ vinegar," Alfieri says. Or, as an appetizer, "dip bread into a mixture of olive oil and balsamic vinegar."

And there's nothing wrong with a little indulgence now and then—such as a slice of apple pie topped with cheddar or a scoop of ice cream, rather than, say, a Twinkie. "Dessert is not the enemy," Alfieri says. "It's about how often you eat and the quality of the food." ■

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