When Georgia resident Krystie Faulkner was looking through her photos from the holidays, she was bothered by what she saw. At 33 years old, she weighed 275 pounds. And when she mistook herself for her aging mother in those family photos, she knew right then she wanted to improve her diet and lose weight.

“The first step that I took to change my life was really just watching what I ate for a day and writing every single thing down,” Krystie says. “I thought that if I wrote it down, I could look at what I was doing and see where I could change things.”

Keeping a food diary helped her realize how often she ate empty-calorie foods like cakes and cookies and loaded up on second servings and extra cheese. And it motivated her to change. She’s lost 120 pounds since she started keeping a food diary three years ago. She even chronicled her weight loss on YouTube.com and her blog.

Keeping a food diary can help you keep your calories in check. By cutting about 500 calories a day from your diet, you could lose one to two pounds a week. This might also lower your risk for heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and diabetes. You could also use a food diary to identify problem eating patterns or to keep track of your salt intake.

Food Diary Doubles Weight Loss

About 70 percent of Americans are overweight or obese. If you’re on the heavy side, you may have considered a diet, diet pill, or program to help you lose weight. However, recent research suggests one of the best tools for weight loss is a food diary.

In a recent study, dieters who wrote down everything they ate lost twice as much weight as those who didn’t.

About 1,700 overweight or obese adults were part of the study. Their average weight was 212 pounds in the beginning. During the 20-week study, the dieters who kept a food diary six or seven days a week lost an average of 18 pounds. Those who did not keep a food diary only lost an average of 9 pounds in the same amount of time.

Take the Healthy Eating Quiz

How much do you really know about your eating habits? Take the Healthy Eating Quiz to find out.

Y  N  Don’t Know

☐  ☐  ☐ I know how many calories I consume each day.

☐  ☐  ☐ I eat a healthy amount of fruits and vegetables daily.

☐  ☐  ☐ I eat less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day.

☐  ☐  ☐ I always drink an adequate amount of water.

☐  ☐  ☐ I know how many calories I should consume for a healthy weight.

If you answered No or Don’t Know to any of these statements, you could benefit from keeping a food diary. When you know what you’re eating, you can make adjustments in your diet that can help you lose weight, reduce your risk for chronic diseases, and improve your health.
How to Record Your Diet Daily
✔ Use a paper notebook, web-based program, or smartphone app to keep track of your daily diet. Or develop your own system. It’s important that you choose a method to record your daily diet that works for you.
✔ Write down everything you eat and drink for meals and snacks.
✔ Include the location and time of day with each entry to help you identify specific eating patterns.
✔ Be honest. You may not want to include an indulgent dessert in your food diary. But listing everything you eat is the only way to see what you’re doing right and what you can improve on.
✔ Keep your food diary with you and record what you eat after each meal or snack.

Count Your Calories
The average 40-year-old needs 1,800 to 2,600 calories a day. But everyone’s calorie needs are different. An active teen burns more calories than an inactive teen. Men usually need more calories than women do. And everyone needs fewer calories as they age. Use a calorie calculator, such as this one (http://tinyurl.com/drcua), to help you find your calorie goal.

Look up calorie and nutritional information http://caloriecount.about.com

How many calories are you eating?
Read food labels to find out. Most packaged food labels include the number of calories in each serving. (And make a note of how much they list as a serving. It’s often a lot less than you think it is!) You can also use your food diary to track how much sugar, sodium, and fat you’re eating.

Look for calorie information at restaurants. In the United States, all restaurants with 20 or more locations must provide nutritional information for their menu items. In most cases, you can find this information online. And what you learn might surprise you. A typical fast-food hamburger contains about 600 calories. A 16-ounce soft drink contains about 185 calories. And a serving of French fries can add another 350 calories to your meal if you eat out.

Sources:
# Keep a Food Diary

**Instructions**

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of days you keep a food diary.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you kept a record of what you ate. To complete the Challenge, you must meet the goal on at least 22 days out of the month. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH:</th>
<th>HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUN.</td>
<td>HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MON.</td>
<td>HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUE.</td>
<td>HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WED.</td>
<td>HC</td>
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<td>THU.</td>
<td>HC</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRI.</td>
<td>HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT.</td>
<td>HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weight &amp; weekly summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>______ Number of days this month I kept a food diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>______ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking or biking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other wellness projects completed this month:**

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Name ____________________________________________ Date __________________________

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