Your Food Diary Guide: Getting Started

USING MYFITNESSPAL APP ON YOUR TABLET OR MOBILE DEVICE

Self-monitoring your food intake by keeping a food diary is a powerful strategy that may help you reach your goals. Keeping a food diary is not right for everyone. Some people find it informative and helpful. Some find it bothersome and difficult. Would you consider trying self-monitoring to see if it is or is not for you? There are other strategies to self-monitor such as exclusively focusing on your high-risk times (see wanting module). If you choose to self-monitor, this document will help you understand and set up the process.

HERE ARE SOME BENEFITS

- ✅ Studies show people who keep food records lose 2-3 times more weight than those who don't. It can **HELP YOU WORK TOWARD YOUR GOALS.**
- ✅ It **INCREASES YOUR AWARENESS** of your eating patterns and helps identify areas to focus your efforts.
- ✅ It **INFORMS** you about the calorie content of various foods. You may be surprised at the high calorie density of some foods, as well as the low-calorie density of others. It also informs you about the sodium, sugar and fiber content of various foods.
- ✅ It **HELPS YOU PLAN** your meals and snacks. You can pre-track your selections to see if you're on target.
- ✅ It **HOLDS YOU ACCOUNTABLE** for what you eat and how much.
- ✅ It **PREDICTS YOUR PROGRESS**. It reveals at the end of the day if you have met your calorie target, which is the best predictor of what will happen to your weight.

Getting Started

1 **START RECORDING**

a. Go to your food **Diary (see A)**.

b. To add food to your diary, click + **Add Food** for the meal that you would like to track **(see B)** or the blue + button at the bottom centre of the screen **(see C)**. If you use option C, then click **Food** followed by the meal or snack that you want to add to.

c. Enter the food you want to record in the **Search for a food** box at the top of the screen. A brand name or more specific descriptor (e.g. brown rice cooked) may help you narrow the options from the database.

d. Click on the selection from the database that best matches your food.

e. Change the **Number of Servings** OR change the **Serving Size**, if necessary, by choosing a different serving size from the drop-down menu. You may need to change both (see examples on the next page).

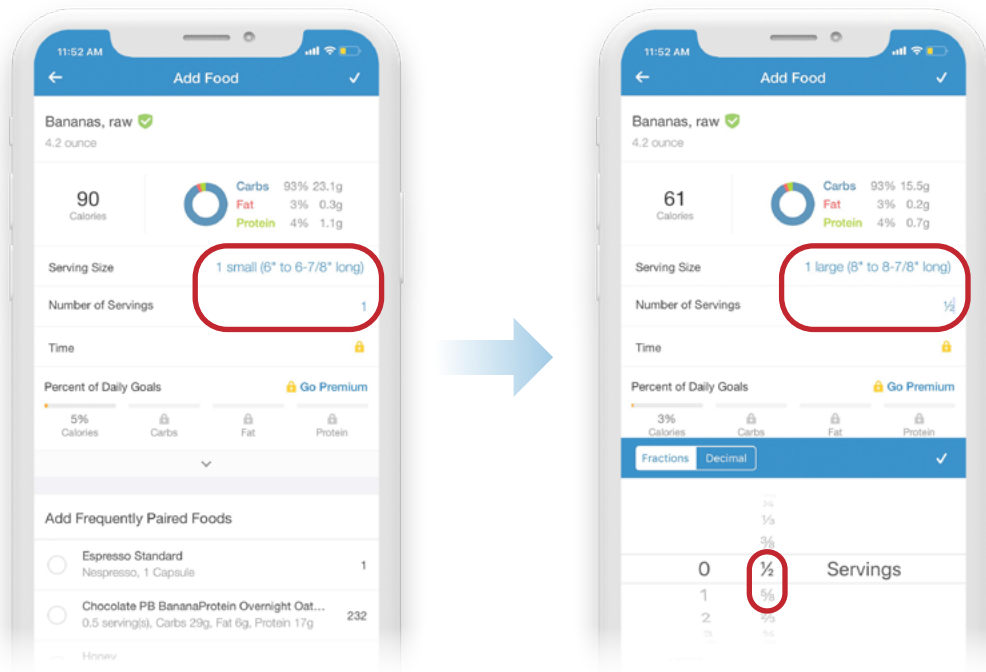f. Click the check mark in the top right corner to add the food item to your food diary.
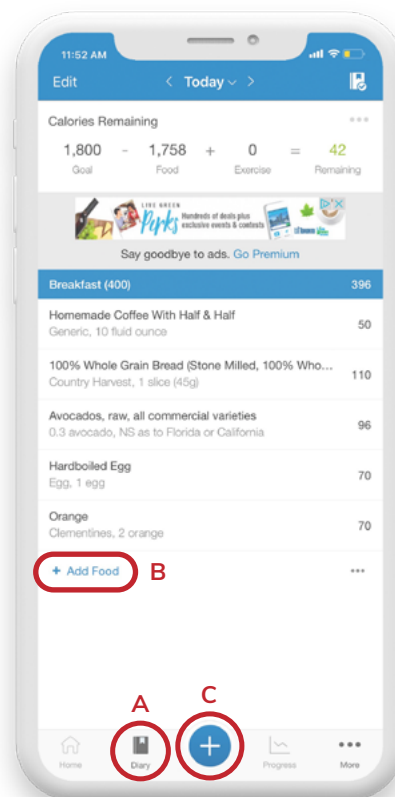
EXAMPLE 1: CHANGING FROM 1 SERVING (OF 1 CUP) TO ½ SERVING TO REFLECT ½ CUP CONSUMED.
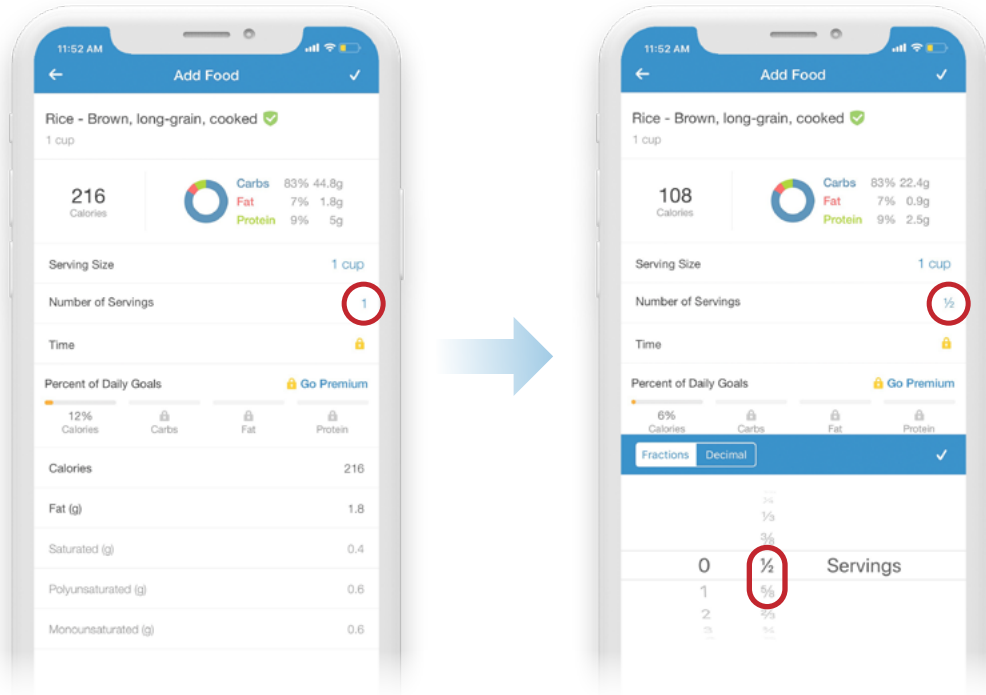
EXAMPLE 2: CHANGING FROM 1 SERVING OF A SMALL BANANA TO ½ SERVING OF A LARGE BANANA.

2 **BAR CODE SCANNER**

In stead of searching the database for commercial food items, simply scan the bar code on the package.

1. Click on Add Food on your diary page.
2. Click on the bar code icon **(see A)**. Place the bar code in front of your device camera and hold for scanning. The information on the Nutrition Facts Table will appear on the screen. Modify the # of servings or serving size as needed.

3 **RECENT AND FREQUENT TABS**

When you first start tracking, these two tabs will be blank. As you enter foods into your food diary, these foods will be added to your Recent and Frequent lists. This will enable you to create a "mini" database of your common foods from which you can select in future entries. You can access these lists when you click on Add Food in your food diary. To improve efficiency, you can select multiple food items in your Recent and Frequent list.

1. Click on Add Food on your diary page. You will then see your Recent list for that meal category and have the option to switch to your frequent list **(see B)**.
2. Click on the Multi-add button **(see C)** on the bottom right and this will show "bubbles" in front of each food item in your recent list. Select multiple items by clicking on the bubble which then adds a check mark **(see D)**. The Multi-add button will change to Add (#) **(see C)**.

Once all selections have been made, click on the Add (#) button to add the items to your food diary.

4 **MY FOODS TAB**

If you have the nutrition information of a particular food or recipe that you cannot find in the My Fitness Pal database, you can add a food under the My Foods tab. To enter a new food, click on Add Food on your diary page, then the My Foods tab and 'Create a Food' **(see E)**.

Go to the Food tab, then My Foods tab. The program will prompt you to enter the product name, the serving size, and the nutrition information that is found on the food label.
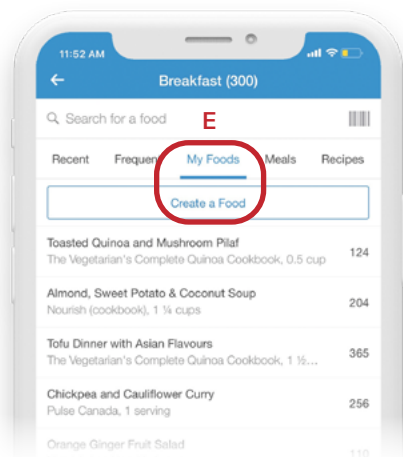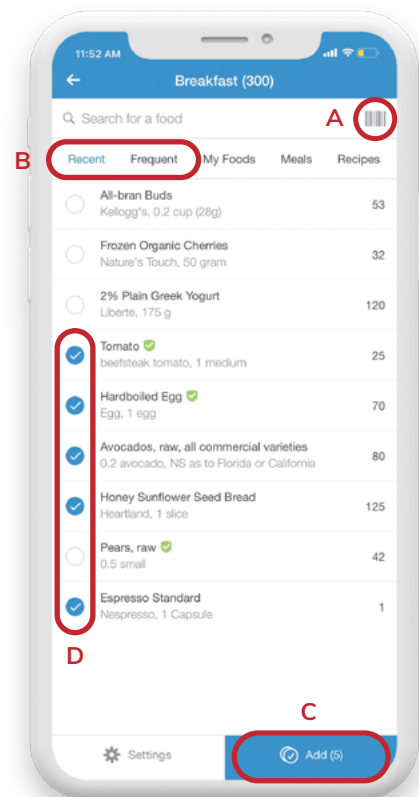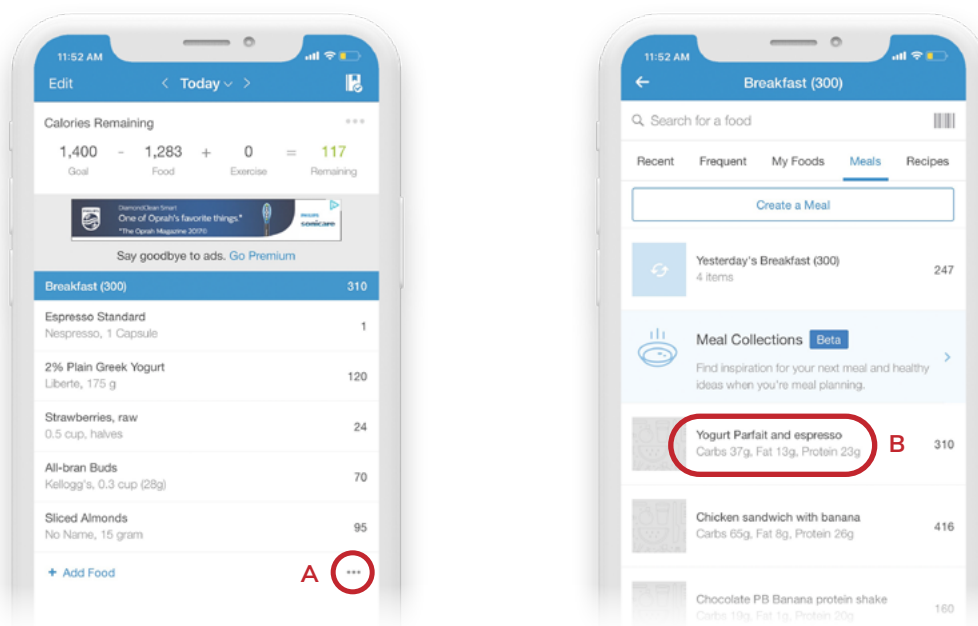
5 MY MEALS TAB

If you tend to eat common meals over and over again (e.g. yogurt and berries with bran buds and almonds and an espresso for breakfast), it will improve efficiency to save these meals.

1. Enter the meal you wish to save in your food diary.
2. Click ••• **(see A)** and then select 'Save as Meal.' Name your meal (e.g. "Yogurt Parfait and espresso") and then click 'Save' in the top right corner.

The meal will be saved under the My Meals tab. You can access this list when you click on '+ Add Food' in your food diary, and then the 'My Meals' tab **(see B)**.

If you select this meal in future entries, you also have the option of changing the food items for this meal. For example, after you have selected "Yogurt Parfait and espresso" from My Meals, the list of food items will appear in your diary. If you added a banana to your yogurt parfait instead of strawberries, you can delete the entry for strawberries by swiping the item from right to left and then add a banana by clicking on +Add Food and searching the database.

6 COPY MEALS FROM ONE DAY TO ANOTHER

If you tend to eat common meals over and over again (e.g. yogurt and berries with bran buds and almonds and an espresso for breakfast), it will improve efficiency to save these meals.

1. On your food diary page, under the meal you want to copy click ••• **(see A)** on the right side of the screen.
2. Select the 'Copy To Date' option. You will be prompted to select the meal you wish to copy it to and the date.

Improving Accuracy

1. Track your intake during the day after eating or at least at the end of the day so that you do not have to rely on your memory to remember each food and beverage consumed. You can also pre-track your intake. For example, if you're packing your lunch and snacks for the next day, you can pre-track them ahead of time. You can also use it as a planning tool by pre-tracking any planned meals and snacks days in advance. You can always go back later and edit any entries as needed.
2. Weigh and measure your food portions whenever possible. This will help ensure you are not underestimating or overestimating your intake.
3. Choose wisely from the MFP database. The information in the database is inputted by members and is not necessarily accurate. You will learn about the average calories per serving per food group in the first couple of sessions. Once you have learned this, you can use this knowledge to assess the accuracy of the information. For packaged foods, compare the information in My Fitness Pal with the Nutrition Facts table on the package or scan the bar code.

Inputting Mixed Dishes

You have 3 options for tracking mixed dishes, such as chili, stir-fries or casseroles:

1. Add a recipe. The most accurate option is to enter the recipe. If it's a dish that you have often and that you make in the same way each time, it may be worth investing the time to enter the recipe so that it is available for future tracking. Ask your dietitian for detailed instructions on how to enter a recipe.
2. 'Deconstruct' the meal and enter each ingredient. If you've eaten 2 cups of chili for example, you may estimate that you've consumed ½ cup extra lean ground beef, ½ cup of kidney beans, ½ cup of tomato sauce, and ½ cup of chopped vegetables (onions, peppers, mushrooms). Enter each ingredient into your food diary.
3. Select a similar dish in the database and modify the portion to reflect estimated calories. This requires deconstructing the meal into each ingredient, estimating each portion and doing an 'on the spot' quantification using the average calories per serving per food group (you will learn about the average calories per serving per food group in the first couple of sessions). Then, select a similar dish from the database and modify the portion to reflect the calories you've estimated. So, for example, ½ cup of lean ground beef is about 150 Kcal, ½ cup beans is about 150 Kcal, ½ cup tomato sauce is about 30 Kcal and ½ cup cut up vegetables is about 15 Kcal, for a total of 345 Kcal for 2 cups of chili.

Inputting Restaurant Meals

Quantifying restaurant meals is challenging. The nutrition information of menu items for various chain restaurants is available in the My Fitness Pal database. For menu items of other restaurants, use a similar method to tracking a mixed meal as option #2 or 3 above. In addition, to account for hidden fats in sauces, marinades, in sautéing, etc, add an additional 150-250 Kcal by using 'Quick Add Calories':

a.   Within the meal that you ate out and want to account for hidden calories, click •••
b.   Select 'Quick Add' and then entre the number of additional calories that you want to add

Tracking Exercise (optional)

Scroll down to the bottom of your food diary and click on 'Notes' and then 'Exercise Notes.' Add a description of your exercise, then click the check mark in the top right corner to save. Add exercise as 'Notes' only. Inputting specific exercises in the tool will increase your calorie target for the day, which is not recommended.

Tracking Your Weight (optional)

Click the blue plus sign at the bottom centre of the screen and then the Weight icon. Entre your weight, adjust the date if needed and the click the check mark in the top right corner to save.