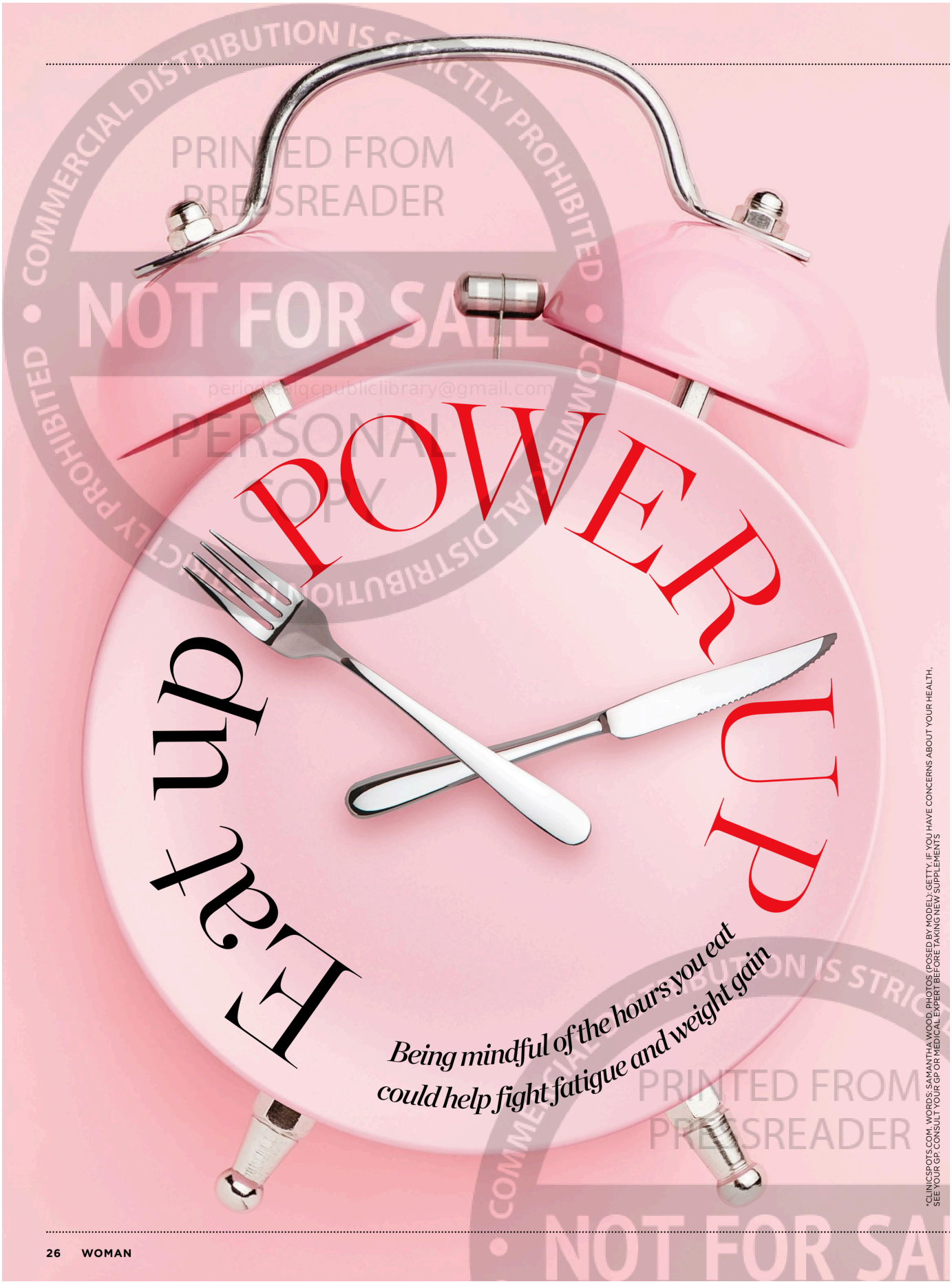
- Eating customs / Fatigue / Body weight



Eat up POWER UP

Being mindful of the hours you eat could help fight fatigue and weight gain

*CLINICSPOTS.COM. WORDS: SAMANTHA WOOD. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODEL): GETTY. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP. CONSULT YOUR GP OR MEDICAL EXPERT BEFORE TAKING NEW SUPPLEMENTS

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You've probably heard a lot of different things about the 'best' time to eat – from waiting until the afternoon, to 'breakfasting like a king' and 'dining like a pauper'. So, if you're confused, join the club. 'For many midlife women dealing with hormonal shifts, insulin resistance and metabolism changes, *when* you eat can be just as important as *what* you eat,' says health coach Steve Bennett (healthresults.com) – that timing doesn't just affect weight, but energy, mood and hormone regulation, too. So here's an idea of what you should be eating, but – most importantly – when.

YOUR DAILY MENU



7-8am: Breakfast

Listen to your body and make adjustments that work for you and your schedule, says Steve. This is especially the case with breakfast – only eat it if you're genuinely hungry, not if it's just habitual. A bowl of berries with ground flaxseed and plain Greek yogurt gives your body a gentle start without the insulin spike of traditional breakfast foods.

10-11am: Morning snack

Energy levels dipping and feel you need a quick pick-me-up before lunch? A handful of nuts with an apple provides sustained energy through fibre and healthy fats. The apple's pectin slows sugar absorption, keeping blood glucose steady.

1-2pm: Lunch

Consuming 50% of daily calories at lunchtime utilises peak insulin sensitivity and reduces late-day hunger. Begin with non-starchy vegetables, like leafy greens, cucumber and peppers, before adding protein and healthy fats, such as olive oil, avocado, salmon, eggs or chicken breast. This fibre-first approach slows glucose absorption from other foods that follow.



4pm: Sleep-supportive snack

Only reach for a mid-afternoon snack if you feel hungry. A small helping of cottage cheese with pumpkin seeds increases the production of your 'happy hormone' serotonin and improves sleep quality later on.



6-7pm: Dinner

Finishing your meal earlier in the evening – at least two or three hours before bed – gives your body time to digest before sleep, supporting better overnight recovery. Vegetable or lentil soup, or lightly steamed greens, followed by some protein like grilled steak, chicken, salmon or tofu helps digestion before your sleep hormone, melatonin, starts rising.

Midlife meals

Eating well, at the right times, is crucial in midlife when our bodies behave differently. 'After age 45, women experience up to a 25% decline in insulin sensitivity, increasing the risk of blood sugar spikes and abdominal fat,' says nutrition expert Krutika Nanavati*. Levels of our stress hormone, cortisol, also shift, leading to energy crashes and disrupted sleep when meals are mistimed, she adds.

Why dining after 8pm isn't great

Night owl? Having a heavy meal later in the evening can lead to...

- **Greater calorie intake and weight gain**
- **Higher Body Mass Index (BMI)**
- **Acid reflux, heartburn and bloating**
- **Nightmares**
- **Raised blood pressure**

YOU CAN STILL HAVE A TREAT

The best time to enjoy your fave sweet treat is within 30 minutes of finishing a balanced meal that includes protein and fibre. 'Your digestive system is already processing these slower-digesting nutrients, which helps moderate the impact of the sweet addition,' explains Steve. If you're having a standalone treat, consider a small fibre and protein snack first, like a few raw veggies with houmous or a small handful of nuts.



Tuck in after a workout

Nutritionist Harriet Bates shares her top tips for refuelling after exercise...

- **IMMEDIATELY**

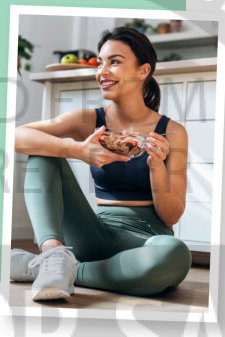
Rehydrate straight after a workout, so drink water and consider some sort of electrolyte drink or supplement.

- **WITHIN 30 MINUTES**

Soon after training, you should have a 'recovery snack' which needs to include protein and carbs, so something like Greek yogurt with granola, Soreen with peanut butter or beef jerky.

- **YOUR POST-WORKOUT MEAL**

Avoid fried foods, pizza, white bread, white pasta and white rice and aim for a balanced meal with plenty of protein, fruit and veg. Protein-rich foods (lean meat, eggs, poultry, tofu) are key for building and repairing muscles, carbs (sweet potato, brown rice, wholewheat pasta, baked beans) also aid recovery, and healthy fats (avocado, nuts) reduce inflammation.



Widen your weight-loss window

One popular theory is that the best way to keep your metabolism optimal is to go 12 hours without eating, as that's when your body starts to burn fat cells, according to research. So, if you have dinner at 7pm and don't eat again until 7am the next morning, you'll burn fat while you sleep. However, if you eat at 8pm, snack at 10pm and eat breakfast 10 hours later, your body won't reach the overnight fat-burning stage. 'This approach, often called time-restricted eating, can also help regulate hormones, improve insulin sensitivity and boost your energy levels,' says Steve, who believes women thrive even more if they can extend their overnight fast to 14-16 hours.