

Eat This, Not That!

The 9 Best Meal Replacement Bars, Recommended by Nutritionists



In a perfect world, everyone would have the time and headspace to make a well-balanced breakfast, a nourishing lunch, and a healthy dinner. All would be within the calorie requirements that a person needs to meet their health goals, made with fresh ingredients, and of course, it would be absolutely delicious. But because we can't live in a perfect world all the time, we often need to rely on meal replacement bars.

Most people are busy and don't have the time to make all of their meals. Others don't have the nutrition knowledge to know what is considered "healthy" or which foods fall into their specific nutrition needs.

To solve both problems at once, we asked registered dietitian nutritionists for their picks of the 9 best meal replacement bars.

Why do people choose meal replacement bars?

"Meal replacement bars have become popular over the years because of their convenience," says Melissa Rifkin, MS, RD, CDN, owner of Melissa Rifkin Nutrition, LLC. "For those who are on a tight schedule, eat on the road or maybe aren't confident in the kitchen, a grab-and-go bar that covers many nutrient needs is an easy option. Outside of convenience, meal replacement bars can provide a good combination of protein, carb and fat, and additional essential nutrients, like fiber, vitamins, and minerals."

Most dietitians do not promote the use of meal replacement bars on the regular. However, they can fit into a healthy diet in a pinch.

"Some days, a bar is the best that some of us can do, and that's OK", says Brittany Scanniello, RD.

"Sometimes we need that bar so we can eat it while we drink our coffee in the school drop-off line or on a conference call."

Most dietitians recommend balancing a meal replacement bar with some other healthy food options to ensure the intake of adequate nutrients, as some bars may not have enough calories, protein, or fat to keep you going.

How to choose the best meal replacement bars.

A "best" meal replacement bar for one person may be a "worst" bar for another, because individuals have different nutrition needs and goals. The same bar would not meet the needs of a 300-pound body building man as it would for a 100-pound sedentary woman.

Carly Fenimore of Fertility-RD in Charlotte, NC provides specific guidelines she uses in her practice when evaluating which bars are best:

- **a combination of adequate macronutrients**

(carbohydrates, protein and fat).

- **healthy fats should come from poly and monounsaturated sources such as nuts, seeds, nut butters, and oils like olive and flaxseed.**
- **contain a source of fiber to help keep you fuller for a longer period of time**
whole-food-based ingredient list to maximize nutritional benefit.
- **300 or more calories to meet meal requirements.**

Some meal replacement bars that are lower in sugar and calories are made with artificial sweeteners. If you are trying to avoid these ingredients, you should carefully evaluate the ingredient list to make sure you are not loading your body up with these additions.

How to make meal replacement bars more of a balanced meal.

"All bars are different so be sure to read the labels and most importantly, listen to your body", says Kayla Fitzgerald, RDN, LD of Nutrition Rites in Charleston, SC.

If a bar contains fewer than 300 calories and it is meant to be a meal replacement, it should be paired with other food. "If you eat a bar that's supposed to be a 'meal replacement' but you find yourself still hungry when you're finished it means that your body needs more fuel!"

She suggests pairing the bar with some Greek yogurt and a piece of fruit if hunger tends to strike shortly after enjoying your bar-of-choice.

What are the best meal replacement bars to buy according to dietitians?

4. Best Balanced Bar: Go Macro



"One of my favorite bars is GoMacro," says Rifkin.

"While they do contain some added sugar, I enjoy the taste, the balance of other nutrients works well for me and I'm willing to limit sugar elsewhere in my diet to account for the reasonable amount coming from these bars. Life is about balance! I also enjoy that these bars are vegan, organic, a good source of protein and are low FODMAP."