

Using Meal Replacements — by Liz Saville, Bariatric Educator

Characteristics of a good meal replacement

200-250 calories

20-35g Protein

3-5g Fat

15-22g Carbohydrates

Fibre – more is better

There needs to be a wide variety of vitamins and minerals listed on the label!

Meal replacement bars and shakes can be one of the most useful tools for someone looking to lose weight. There are a variety of ways to use meal replacements and a number of reasons why you *should* use them. Meal replacements are not appropriate for everyone, however, but they can be very helpful in initiating weight loss and maintaining weight loss over the long term. It is also important to note that there is a difference between meal replacement shakes and protein shakes. Meal replacements tend to have more calories per serving, and more balanced protein and carbohydrate than protein shakes. Protein shakes may have about 100-120cals per serving and have very minimal carbohydrate and fat with very high amounts of protein.



I'd like to start by explaining why using meal replacements can be a good idea. First of all they make life easy. Many people today are very busy, and have fairly unpredictable schedules, which often leads to disorganized and unhealthy eating behaviours. Having a meal replacement in the morning is an easy way to get your breakfast in when you have a busy morning, keeping meal replacements on hand at work or in your car gives you a solid healthy option for lunch if you did not bring a lunch to work, or

if you're stuck working through lunch without time to heat up last night's stir-fry. Using meal replacements for dinner is a little less common as many people like to have a regular sit down meal at this time. However if this is not realistic for you due to your schedule or some other factor, a meal replacement can be beneficial at this time of day as well. Meal replacements are also useful if you struggle with eating appropriate portion sizes. A meal replacement is a very controlled, balanced meal that is much easier to properly portion. It is for this reason that it is better to use fully prepared meal replacements rather than mix up your own at home.

When using meal replacements you can use them in a structured way to initiate some initial weight loss or you can use them periodically to help you stay on track. If you are using them to kick-start some weight loss talk to your physician/bariatric educator team about a plan on how to use them. They will tell you the particulars of what you need to know to make your meal replacement strategy the most effective. If you are using your meal replacements as a way to help stay on track, keep some at home, at work, and/or in your car for those unexpected times when you might need a good meal when you're not prepared. This helps you to stay on track and can take some of the pressure off of ensuring that you plan for exactly what your day will bring.

Some examples of meal replacements include:



VEGA: A vegan meal replacement shake, which is also gluten free. It is a great option if you are a vegetarian and has 15g of fibre per serving! You can get this at Health Food Stores and stores like Shoppers Drug Mart and Wal-Mart.



PGX: The PGX meal replacement is also a high fibre meal replacement, which makes it a good option for those who are low on fibre on a regular basis. The fibre and high protein will help you feel fuller longer. PGX meal replacements can be found in Naturopathic Dispensaries and Health Food Stores.

There are many other very good options for meal replacements that you can get from a variety of stores. If you've found something on your own, write down the nutritional information and bring it in to your appointment and the physician/bariatric educator team will let you know if it is a good choice. Some key aspects of a good meal replacement shake include having about 200-250 calories, at least 20g of protein, and a moderate carbohydrate content.

For more information on meal replacements search the WMC blog for Dr. Wharton's post on meal replacements and also visit Dr. Sharma's blog at www.drsharma.ca and search replacing meals.

Many people are quite resistant to using meal replacements for one reason or other, but it is important to remember that they can be very helpful in keeping you on track just as using a prepackaged yogurt or cheese can.