

Are some people just naturally slim and some, well... not so? We asked a nutritional consultant...

I'll have what she's having

Why is it you're living off lettuce to fit into a party dress, while your best friend scoffs burgers and looks as beach-ready as ever? Well, scientists think they're closer to understanding why some people are naturally thin. Here, Pollyanna Hale — a metabolic conditioning nutritional consultant — explains what the secrets of slim people are...

Pollyanna Hale



1 Eating slowly

It's official. Thin people eat slowly. It takes 20 minutes for hunger signals to reach the brain from your gut, so if you eat too fast, you could easily overeat before realising you're actually full. To take your time over a meal, set a timer for at least 20 minutes, and make your meal last that long. Putting down your fork between mouthfuls, chatting to others at the table, and chewing food properly, are ways to slow down.

2 Good appetite regulation

Apparently, thin people are more in touch with their appetite and know when they're full, so they

stop eating. They also rarely eat if they're not hungry.

Most of us grew up being forced to finish our plates by our well-meaning parents, but actually that's not helpful in the long run.

If you want food, think about when and what your last meal was. Do you actually need more food or are you just eating out of habit because you always eat at that time? An example is biscuits to go with tea. Were you really hungry or is pairing these just something you've always done?

3 Emotional eating

When food is consumed as fuel, your intake matches your

needs. But eating because you're stressed or bored when you weren't actually hungry or needing food, adds up to extra calories.

It seems skinny folk are better at noticing the difference between genuine hunger and needing comfort. If you're seeking comfort, try chatting to a friend, keeping a journal or going for a walk. Or try counting to 10 while doing some deep breathing.

4 Not finishing meals

Do you work with skinny colleagues? Is their lunch leftovers from the night before?

It seems skinny people don't finish their plateful. Even when they pick the most fattening foods, a few mouthfuls in, they're full and the rest gets put aside, so overall they're not eating a vast amount of calories.

The key is, never force yourself to finish a meal. Pay attention and stop when you're full. Also, try not to put so much on your plate in the first place

— you can always go back for more if you're still hungry.

5 Gut health

There's some evidence that gut health determines how many calories we absorb from our food.

Whether it makes enough difference to turn a person from obese to slim is debatable.

But a diverse intake of 'good' bacteria from foods like fermented vegetables is healthy for everyone, and fermented vegetables are also a very low-calorie food to snack on. Pickles and sauerkraut are good examples.



Don't clear your plate if you're full up

What is skinny people's secret?

6 Not eating late at night

Thin people tend to eat their dinner earlier, and therefore stick to healthier foods.

But typically, late-night munchers will turn to high-calorie snacks like ice cream, biscuits, alcohol and crisps.

If you feel peckish in the evening, swapping these for things like fruit and high-protein Greek yogurt will cut the calories consumed. There's nothing wrong with eating in the evenings,

though too much might stop you sleeping well. But really listen to your body to decide whether you're actually hungry or if it's just a nice nightly ritual between you, the telly and the ice cream!

7 Home-cooked food

Restaurant meals and fast food tend to be cooked in lots of oil, with rich sauces added for flavour. Cooking at home means you know what's going into your food.

Home-cooked meals don't have to be complicated. Omelettes and stir-fries are two quick and easy meals, or batch-cook ahead so you've got meals ready to defrost.

If you're eating out or buying ready meals, get to understand nutrition labels and the calories in foods, which will help you make better decisions.

You can always make changes to meals when eating out, such as asking for dressings on the side, skipping the mayonnaise, or swapping chips for a side salad.



Fermented foods aid gut health



A step counter can help

energy by slowing down.

Wearing a step counter can be a good way to make sure you're walking around enough each day, and eating enough, so your energy levels remain high.

9 Skipping meals

Missing meals isn't as bad for us as previously thought, so long as we're getting all the nutrients we need.

Slim people who are in touch with their appetite might eat loads at one meal, but not feel hungry for ages afterwards, so skip a meal or miss breakfast, meaning their overall calorie intake balances out.

We tend to eat by the clock, and our bodies like routine, so will often signal hunger at the 'correct time' whether we need to have food or not.

Rather than eating just because 'it's time', stop and consider if you really need food now. A starting point could be simply delaying eating for 30 minutes to an hour and having a drink instead, then deciding if you still really need a meal or not.

8 Unconscious movement

Do you know a thin person who is always fidgeting? NEAT stands for Non-Exercise-Activity Thermogenesis and is the term applied to all the movement we do that isn't formal exercise, such as jumping up from the kitchen table, or walking around tidying up while on the phone without even realising it.

NEAT can burn an incredible number of calories, and slimmer people are naturally inclined to do more NEAT than others.

It's also very common for NEAT levels to go down when dieting, as your body tries to conserve

10 Sleep

Not sleeping enough raises our amounts of the hormone ghrelin — which tells us to be hungry — while lowering leptin, which keeps us full.

Getting eight hours' sleep each night (or napping if you can) helps keep hunger levels at their normal range, and curbs overeating.

Staying up watching TV or flicking through social media in the evenings are often the culprits. Give yourself a cut-off point at least half an hour before you need to be asleep in order to get up eight hours later.

Reading fiction in bed can help switch your mind off.

So while it may look like some people can eat loads and never put on weight, that's not necessarily so. Thin people might not be eating as much as it seems, or they're moving more, or have great gut bacteria. Luckily anyone can implement some of these tips, whether it's going to bed earlier, or putting less food on your plate.

Pollyanna Hale is a mother of two girls, and understands how difficult it can be for mums to make themselves a priority. For more information, visit pollyannahale.co.uk.