



Gia Marson, Ed.D., and Danielle Keenan-Miller, Ph.D.
The Binge Eating Prevention Plan

How “What I Eat in a Day” Videos Can Impact Mental Health

... and how to be smarter about viewing them.

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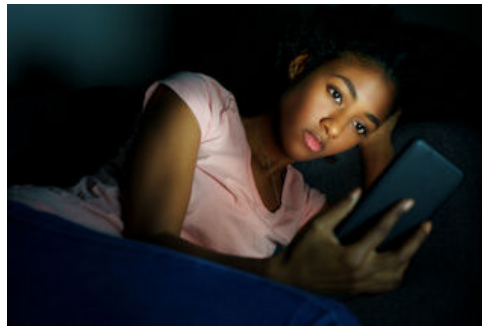
 Reviewed by Devon Frye



KEY POINTS

- “What I eat in a day” videos could be a source of inspiration, particularly around meal preparation, cooking, shopping, and recipe ideas.
 - However, these videos may provide misinformation that can be harmful to our mental and physical health, and
-

eating, can help viewers steer clear of inadvertently dangerous messages.



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*This post was written by
Gia Marson, Ed.D.*

What Exactly Are "What I Eat in a Day" Videos?

These are short video clips of individuals discussing narratives about the food they eat in their day-to-day life. Creators of these videos range from the everyday person to athletes, celebrities, models, nutritionists, doctors, personal trainers, and others. They are commonly found on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.

The hashtag #WhatIEatInADay on social media platforms has billions of views, and many individual YouTube videos have millions of views. Unfortunately, the trend of posting daily and the pervasiveness of these videos may make them seem even more numerous and important than they actually are.

not easily distinguished from truth. Authoritarian institutions and marketers have always known this fact.” —Daniel Kahneman

According to statistics, those between the ages of 15 and 35 have the highest engagement with YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. This is also the age group for which eating disorders are most common. A 2020 study, for example, highlighted the negative impact of social media on thoughts about food and eating in middle school students:

"... a clear pattern of association was found between social media usage and disordered eating cognitions and behaviors with this exploratory study confirming that these relationships occur at younger-age than previously investigated." (Wilksch et al.)

And using social media platforms for health information is on the rise for all age groups, including middle-aged and older-adult populations.

What Are the Risks of "What I Eat in a Day" Videos?

about how a favorite athlete fuels up before a big event, in some cases, these videos may pose risks to individuals' physical and mental health. They may increase your anxiety about eating well and whether your own habits measure up. In addition:

1. They may provide inappropriate nutrition information.

Many “what I eat in a day” videos are created by individuals who have no professional background or qualifications in nutrition or health. This means they may not be providing information that is credible, scientifically based, or follows responsible nutritional guidelines. This may promote unhealthy or even dangerous eating habits.

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One possible solution: View only videos from licensed dietitians, licensed therapists, or medical doctors. In many states, the terms “therapist” and “nutritionist” are not licensed terms. If you are taking advice from someone, do your due diligence to confirm that they have the education, training, and experience required for sharing expertise.

But keep in mind that if the information in the video is making you feel bad rather than good—even if it’s coming from a person who is licensed—consider your reason for watching. Compassion works better than shame or guilt as a motivator—and you deserve to be treated well.

2. They may be unrealistic.

may walk away thinking this video depicts a consistent way of eating that is sustainable and that it accounts for all the hours off-camera. Very likely, that is not true.

One possible solution: Recognize that eating well means listening to your body's nutritional needs as they shift from day to day. Notice how you might need more one day and a bit less the next.

Also, observe how your preferences change over time. Listen to your hunger and fullness cues, and pay attention to what brings you pleasure. Intuitive eating, not following someone else's body's needs or preferences, is a research-supported strategy for balanced eating and whole health.

3. They typically fail to acknowledge individual differences.

Those in these videos frequently omit the fact that everyone is different and has their own unique nutritional needs based on a wide variety of individual factors. Influencers may create the belief that there is only one type of diet to achieve a certain body shape or meet nutritional and health goals. That is a

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One possible solution: Read articles published by academics at research universities. Learn how genetics and factors related to epigenetics impact weight and eating disorders to get a more accurate understanding of the subject matters discussed.

4. They encourage unhealthy comparisons.

These videos make it easy for us to compare how we look with someone who is genetically different. When we undertake this faulty thinking, especially to emulate those we ad-

Unfortunately, attempting to change yourself by mimicking someone else's way of eating can lead to being dangerously underweight or to binge eating. That makes videos showing what one person eats particularly worrying for those with or who have a history of disordered eating. Any messages that reinforce the notion that there is one right way to look are problematic and not backed by science.

One possible solution: Make a family tree, including family photos and important non-physical characteristics of each person. See the range of body types in your family going back a few generations, as well as what made each one unique. Whether you are biologically related to prior generations, it is helpful to accept that there is a wide range of healthy body sizes. Notice ways that you are similar and different from others as a process for respecting your link to others as well as to your individuality.

5. They may be triggering if you are vulnerable to an eating disorder or are in recovery from one.

groups, overexercise, or engage in other unhealthy eating behaviors. Some influencers sharing their food choices may have an eating disorder and not be aware of it. Others may claim they have recovered from an eating disorder, but they may still be struggling with disordered thinking and eating habits. Either way, they may be inadvertently sharing harmful advice.

One possible solution: If you have an eating disorder now or had one in the past, proceed with extreme caution before watching these videos. If the internal voice of your eating disorder gets louder during or after watching, find a new interest to follow as if your life depends on it—because it does. Consult someone on your treatment team or write out what advice you would give to a friend who felt triggered by these videos. Recovery from an eating disorder will give your life back, don't treat risks lightly.

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Remember to View the Videos as Fun or Inspiring—Not Factual

If you watch these videos, it is essential to take the information as creative content that is not meant to be considered the absolute truth. Eating is an imperfect process and everyone's habits change over time. Remind yourself that you don't know the nuanced, complex, human story behind the video clip.

Regardless of the narrator's history, you are not like anyone else. Therefore, it is important not to change your eating habits based on videos that do not take your biology, age, genetics, health, health history, and nutritional needs into account.

The honest, personal lessons you have learned about your body's needs are your best guide. Accept what it takes to fully nourish yourself.

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