Counting Calories? Count Exchanges!

Introduction
Ready to start eating healthier meals with portions that are right for you? Heard members talking about the Food Exchange System in TOPS meetings but not sure how you would use it? No worries—we can learn this together! Once practiced, using the Exchange System will feel less like work and more like setting yourself up for success.

Activity
Let’s try an activity to help us better understand the Exchange System. First, we’ll take a look at page 39 of Real Life. For our activity today, let’s follow the number of daily exchanges recommended for a 1,500-calorie-level diet, which includes: two milk exchanges, four vegetable exchanges, four fruit exchanges, six starch exchanges, five meat/protein exchanges and five fat exchanges.

Now, take a look at page 10 of My Day One. We will be using the breakfast menu for this activity. Let’s start building our breakfast plate with the starch exchange. Notice we have eight different starch options:

**SAMPLE MENU**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STARCH</th>
<th>1 slice (1 oz.) 1/2 English muffin 1/2 c. wheat bran</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FRUIT</td>
<td>1 orange, small (6½ oz.) 1/2 medium banana</td>
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<tr>
<td>MILK</td>
<td>1 cup milk, fat-free 1 c. Lactaid® 6 oz. yogurt, low-fat</td>
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</tbody>
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Materials:
- copies of My Day One
- markers or pens/pencils
- whiteboard/easel with paper or loose-leaf paper

Preparation:
The week prior, ask members to bring copies of My Day One and, if available, copies of Real Life to this meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, distribute photocopies of p. 39 of Real Life to members who don’t have their own books. Distribute pens/pencils and paper for members to write a menu individually, or leaders may use a board or easel with paper to write a menu as a group.
Sounds like a great addition to our breakfast! Now it’s time for a little math. Let’s subtract the breakfast exchanges we chose from our daily allowance of exchanges and see what we have left. Remember, page 39 of *Real Life* suggests daily allowances of exchanges based on your calorie level.

*(Allow members 3 minutes to calculate the number of exchanges remaining.)*

Who can tell me which exchanges we have left for the day?

*(Allow members to respond.)*

We have four starch exchanges, three fruit exchanges, four meat/protein exchanges, one milk exchange, four fat exchanges and, because we did not have a vegetable with breakfast, we still have four vegetable exchanges left.

Please know that the number of exchanges on page 39 of *Real Life* are only suggestions, and it’s always best to check with your healthcare professional for the best plan for you.

**Wrap-Up**

Now that we have had a little practice, hopefully everyone is feeling more comfortable with the Food Exchange System. Remember, like anything else, it takes time to learn how the system works, but you don’t have to do it all at once or by yourself. Try incorporating the Exchange System into your daily meals slowly. Team up with a buddy so you can work on understanding and using it together. The more time you put into the Exchange System now, the easier it will be later. Before you know it, you’ll be a Food Exchange System master!