

Calorie Intake

You are a smart person who just wants to know how to make good nutritional choices. You are also a hard-working consumer who is bombarded by diet information, nutritional products, and targeted marketing. And it is certain that you have heard a thing or two about calories.

Well, calorie counts only cover a small fraction of the big picture of nutrition. So it is time to understand that there is more to your nutritional plan than simply counting calories. Below are common mistakes that consumers make when it comes to calories.

Thinking that all calories are equal

The idea of calories going in (via food) and calories being used (via activity) is the basis of energy balance. In order to maintain our body weight, we must balance our calories in and calories out. In order to lose weight, we must ‘burn’ more calories than we take in; a very basic concept, right?

Because all calories are not created equal, the body responds differently to a calorie of protein than it does to a calorie of carbohydrate or fat. For example, protein calories require a lot of energy to digest. Therefore, when protein is eaten, metabolism is increased.

Also, the body has separate responses to different kinds of carbohydrate calories. As an example, if you ate 200 calories of broccoli (that is a lot of broccoli) versus 200 calories of ice cream, do you think that your body would react to these carbohydrates in the same way?

Different kinds of fat also cause the body to behave in various ways. Trans fat from muffins, doughnuts, and cake elicits a much different response than the unsaturated fats in fish, nuts and avocado.

The body also has hormones that respond to the composition of food. For example, the hormone insulin responds much differently to carbohydrates than it does to protein or fat. These hormones also behave differently depending on what time of day the calories are consumed. Specifically, carbohydrates are best tolerated in the 2 hours after exercise because insulin shoves the carbs straight into the muscle (instead of the fat cells).

Do you still believe that all calories are equal?

Only worrying about caloric content rather than food quality

It is amazing how many people will justify their food choices based on calories. A large majority of people who are trying to cut calories often eat treats and processed snacks all day in place of nutritious foods. The rationale for their choice is that the treats/snacks have the same amount of calories as a healthier choice.

But the body does not care about numbers. It cares about food quality. It is concerned about extracting vital nutrients, vitamins, and minerals from the food you eat. And it is not fooled by your attempt to feed it low quality, chemically-treated food. Treats and processed foods are empty calories. They have nothing to offer the body (other than extra material for fat storage). Natural, clean, whole foods are nutrient-rich and filled with the stuff your body needs. So, stop replacing what your body needs with those 'other' calories!

Not eating enough calories (for fat loss)

By focusing solely on the calories in food, most health-conscious persons end up eating too few calories. And when the body does not receive enough calories, it reacts by lowering metabolism and simultaneously increasing hunger. If your calories are minimal, you will actually burn less fuel, have less energy, and be hungrier. Progress will be slow, you will feel miserable, and failure to stick with the low calories will result in immediate weight gain.

What is the solution? If your goal is to shed fat, you still need to take in less calories than you burn. Another way is, you can still have a calorie deficit when you eat more. How? By exercising more! By doing more activity. Why would you want to eat more and exercise more?

- To boost your metabolism.
- To maintain the muscle mass.
- To be able to cause a constant flow of energy in the body throughout the day.
- To give the body more nutrients with which to thrive.

Eating your calories all at one time

A few people that skip breakfast eat a small lunch, refuse to make the time for nutritious snacks, and ultimately stuff themselves with a 5-course dinner. These people truly believe that they are doing wonders for their physique by depriving themselves of a lot of calories throughout the day. But this pattern is extremely destructive to one's health and waistline.

When eating very few calories throughout the day, the body protects itself by slowing the metabolism way down. If it is not receiving any calories, then it has no fuel to burn. The body needs to keep burning fuel in order to stay alive. If you consistently deprive your self of fuel, then the body will begin offering up its own muscle as fuel.

So, if this person now has less muscle and a chronically slower metabolism, their 5-course dinner will not be digested very efficiently. In fact, most of it will be stored as fat. Also, it is very difficult to fit multiple servings of fruit, vegetables, lean protein, and fat into one or two daily meals. This person is not only quickly gaining fat, but he/she is most likely undernourished as well.

What's the fix? We need to eat more often throughout the day in order to maintain our lean muscle and to keep metabolism high.

Meals should consist of smaller portions, contain a mix of veges, fruits, proteins, fats, and slow-burning carbs, and be spaced out every 2-4 hours.

Focusing on calories burned only during exercise

The health industry has taught us to pay attention to the amount of calories we burn during an exercise. For this reason, longer spans of low intensity exercise are often viewed as optimal. You can sustain activity at this level and accumulate a lot of calories. However, lower intensity exercise does not burn any more calories after the exercise ends.

High intensity bouts of strength training and interval training will burn calories during and after exercise. In fact, the more intense the exercise, the longer you burn calories afterward.

Calorie Deprivation

Calorie deprivation is a very popular way one can attempt to reduce weight. When the number of calories that you take in equals the number of calories that you expend in energy, you are maintaining an energy balance and your weight will not fluctuate very much. Conventional wisdom (as well as most diet books) says that if you cut back on calories, the end result will be weight loss. This method has proven to be nothing short of long-term-weight-loss-suicide!

When you cut back on calories many reactions begin to happen inside your body.

We figure out that our body burns 2200 calories a day on its own so we decide or are told that we need to reduce our calories to 1200 a day and we will loose 2 or 3 a week. You proceed with the diet and guess what? You lost 2 kilos the first week and a week later you have lost another kilo. This is great. A strange thing happens in week six, however. You step on the scale and there is no change. What now? Simple. Reduce your caloric intake to 900 calories. A miracle

happens. The scale starts to move again. However, there is one small problem. The weight loss is accompanied by these deep, dark, uncontrollable cravings for junk foods and other bad things. You try to ignore the cravings but once you hit another plateau, you question your willpower, and give in. Not only do you give in, you go out of control. In the end you blame nothing but your willpower.

In reality, it had nothing to do with willpower and everything to do with your body's natural response to *Calorie Deprivation*.

When you deprive your body of calories it begins to sense that it is starving. Your body has no idea that you are dieting to loose weight. All it knows is that it must act fast so that it does not die. This sets off a chemical reaction in your brain that tries to drive you towards substances that will enable you to survive this perceived famine. Your brain will drive you towards the nutrient that it can survive on the longest - FAT!! And the substance that will provide the quickest energy boost - SUGAR!! You are now in a complete binge state caused by the diet.

That is not the end, however. The weight loss you noticed on the scale was a combination of three things.

Water, which provides extremely short-term weight loss at best, a little bit of fat, and quite a bit of muscle. When you deprive your body of the proper nutrients, which is what happens on a low calorie diet, it goes straight to the muscle to strip away the nutrients stored inside.

The diet centers and diet book authors know these facts, but it is their dirty little secret. They know that if people notice weight loss on the scale, no matter what kind of weight loss it was, they will be happy. Who cares that they are sabotaging your ability to loose weight in the long term? It is business for them. The most alarming aspect of all of this is the fact that diets strip you of your lean muscle. You see, lean muscle is metabolically active tissue. This means that it burns fat. In fact, it is the only thing in the human body that will

actually burn away a fat cell. When you diet and cannibalize your lean muscle you are ultimately slowing down your metabolism. This is the exact opposite of what you were trying to do. The end result of any calorie depriving diet is reduced metabolism, a reduction in your body's ability to burn fat, a hormone imbalance that leads to binge eating, and ultimately an increase in the accumulation in fat storage.

This is why you gain all of your weight plus some more back when you get off of a diet. Unscientific dieting several times over a period of 10 to 15 years can make you become a fat storing machine.

You have to understand that Calories must be kept high enough to maintain lean muscle so that your body becomes a fat fighting machine.

By following foolish diet programs you are doing nothing but sabotaging your long-term success. The answer is to avoid any program that includes the word diet. The word diet alone implies calorie deprivation. You need to be on a healthy supportive eating plan accompanied by an effective exercise program.

Maintain Your Weight

If, once you have reached your realistic target weight, you go back to your old eating habits and activity levels; you will put the weight back on. It is as simple as that. Beware of 'how to be even skinnier' media messages that lure you into feeling dissatisfied. You have a life to live and enjoy, so hang on the satisfaction of being at a comfortable, healthy weight you can sustain.

- Continue to eat a balanced, lower fat diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Do not avoid any foods, just watch portion sizes and limit the amount of certain foods
- Have three regular meals a day at regular times (starting with breakfast), and fewer snacks
- Eat out occasionally, but limit fast food

- Sit down to eat your meals, take time over them and pay attention to what you are eating
- Keep ‘self-monitoring’ to stay conscious of your new eating and activity habits

Flexible Restraint

Many slim people who stay that way by ‘watching their weight’, show flexible restraint, rather than following rigid all-or-nothing rules. They make healthy choices most of the time, but no foods are seen as forbidden. This means enjoying small amounts of favourite foods without feeling guilty. If you do over-indulge, or have a big night out, cut back a bit or do more exercise the next day to balance things out.

Getting regular physical activity is one of the strongest indicators of long-term success. Not only does it burn calories and increase metabolism-boosting muscle, it also boosts self-esteem and beats stress. Studies show that just walking for 30 minutes or so each day, plus some other activities during the week, may be enough.

Conclusion:

It is true that you need to watch your caloric intake. It is true that you will lose weight if you eat less calories than you burn. But what type of weight do you want to lose? If you want to lose muscle, go ahead and eat low-quality, 100-calorie packs of processed food, deprive your body of important nutrients and energy, and only exercise at a low intensity. You will do a wonderful job of losing muscle and slowing your metabolism way down. Because of this, the little bit of fat you lost in the process will not stay off for long.

If you want to lose fat and maintain a high metabolism, eat more and exercise more. Eat more whole foods like fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, healthy fats, and slow-burning carbs. (Healthy foods that come from natural sources do not usually have many calories anyway!) Space your calories out throughout the day. You will have

more energy for more activity. Make your exercise more intense!
Maintain your muscle because muscle is what burns the fat.