

METABOLISM MAKEOVERS

Metabolism is a hot topic and something weight gain is often attributed to. It's true that people have different resting metabolic rates, but they differ less than you might think. Our eating, exercise and other lifestyle factors, such as stress and sleep, have more to do with our metabolism than our DNA. The good news is whether or not you consider yourself to have a fast or slow metabolism, there's something you can do about it.

What is metabolism? Simply put, it's what happens to food on a cellular level as the body breaks down macronutrients (carbohydrates, protein and fat) for use as energy. The top two things that raise metabolism are exercise and eating (fever also raises metabolism, but that's not recommended!). Basal metabolic rate (BMR) refers to the energy needed to maintain basic bodily functions such as body temperature, the beating of the heart and functioning of other body organs. Essentially the calories it takes each day to keep our body alive.

How many calories you burn daily depends on more than just your BMR, however. There is also energy needed for the digestion and processing of food and energy expended in purposeful activity (i.e. exercise). Another calorie-burning component has more recently been proposed by researchers, called NEAT, which stands for Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis. This is the energy used for unconscious activity, like fidgeting, muscle contraction and posture and may explain a large part of the weight differences between people.

The slow decline. Beginning in your late 20's, you start to lose muscle tissue. This can result in as much as a 2-4% decrease in your BMR each year. Muscle is more metabolically active than fat, so the less muscle we have, the lower our BMR will be.

Revving up the system. So how can we reverse this downward trend and rev up our system? The fastest and most effective way to boost metabolism and to counter muscle loss is to strength train. This increases your muscle-to-fat ratio, which results in increased calorie-burning at rest. You can increase your lean muscle tissue by engaging in as little as two or three sessions a week of resistance training. This can include using free weights, weight machines, resistance bands or exercises using your own body weight, such as yoga, lunges and push-ups. Aerobic activity is also important. Try varying the intensity and type of activity you do for the greatest metabolic boost. High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) workouts are the best of both worlds – strength training and cardio – and very efficient working multiple muscle groups at once in as little as 15 minutes. Look for fitness options such as live streaming, On Demand, or YouTube that can be done at home.

Eating right. Healthy eating habits are also a key component. Think about consuming plenty of protein-rich foods, such as eggs, lean meat, skinless chicken breast, fish, nuts, seeds and legumes. Skimping on calories and skipping meals will do more harm than good so be sure to consume at least 1,200 calories a day and aim to eat a meal or a snack every 3-4 hours. Be sure to include breakfast daily, as it helps jumpstart your metabolism and sets the tone for good food choices and appropriate portion control for the rest of the day.

SENSIBLE SNACKING TO REV METABOLISM

Snacks are mini meals that can help bridge the gap in between meals. When carefully chosen, they help meet daily nutritional needs, keep your metabolism revved, your blood sugar steady and your energy at its peak.

- Plan to eat three moderate-sized meals a day, plus one to two healthy snacks.
- If your next meal is going to be more than five hours away, plan for a nutritious snack to hold you over (see below for some ideas).
- Think of snacks as another opportunity to get the nutrients you might not otherwise get from your regular meals – it's a great time to get extra fruits and veggies!
- Balance your snacks by combining high-fiber carbs, protein, and small amounts of healthy fats.
- Avoid empty calories from chips, cookies, sweets and soda.
- Whenever possible, skip packaged snack foods and opt for real food instead. Remember, a snack is a mini meal so it can be anything you would eat at a meal, just a smaller portion size.
- Some snacking guidelines to consider:
 - Stick to snacks that top out at about 250 calories (individual needs may vary).
 - Look for snacks that are low in sodium – 200mg or less.
 - Opt for snacks that are a good source of fiber – 3 grams or more per serving.
 - Low in added sugar – less than 8 grams per serving, excluding natural sugars.
 - And include a healthy source of protein to aid in satiety.

Energy Boosting Snack Ideas

- Low-fat yogurt with fruit
- Fruit and a handful of nuts
- All-natural nut butter on a brown rice cake
- Low-fat cheese on whole grain crackers
- High-fiber cereal with low-fat milk
- Hummus and cucumber slices in a whole wheat pita
- Low-fat cottage cheese and fruit
- Oatmeal with sunflower seeds
- Black bean dip with low-fat whole grain tortilla chips
- Mashed avocado on whole grain bread
- Whole grain toaster waffle with berries
- Sliced turkey and low-fat cheese roll-ups
- Canned tuna or salmon with diced tomatoes and cucumbers
- Veggie burger
- Microwavable bean burrito with salsa
- Chocolate milk
- Fruit smoothie with low-fat milk or yogurt
- Trail mix