



BalanceHealth Newsletter

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The Infamous Calorie

In today's society calories have a bad reputation. People are constantly trying to avoid them and opting for low-cal versions of their favorite foods. Understanding what a calorie actually is and its function once it enters our bodies may enable us to have a healthier relationship with it and food in general.

A calorie is simply a unit of energy. Of course in this article we will be discussing calories as they relate to food, however calories apply to anything that contains energy, such as gasoline. The calorie count that you find on food packages is actually a measure of how much potential energy a serving of that particular food can supply your body. Therefore, the more calories a food or beverage contains the more energy it can give you.

Calories are absolutely essential to our survival as they serve as our fuel. Our bodies need the energy that calories provide, not just for running marathons and making it through the workday, but also for basic bodily functions – to breathe, move, and pump blood. When we ingest food, our bodies begin digestion, this is when calories are broken down and transported to cells via the bloodstream. They are either absorbed for immediate use or they proceed to the final stage of metabolism where they are stored for future energy needs.

As we can see, calories are not inherently evil. They provide us with the energy we need to survive and thrive. The problem is that when too many calories are consumed, they are not able to be used for energy, so they are being stored inside the body which results in weight gain. The key is to burn as many calories as you take in. If you ingest the same amount of calories as you work off during the day you will maintain your current weight. Similarly, if you take in more calories than you burn you will gain weight and if you burn more calories than you ingest you will lose weight. Generally, eating 3,500 extra calories will result in a weight gain of 1 pound. Conversely, if you burn off 3,500 more calories than you ingested you will lose 1 pound.

So how many calories does a person need on a daily basis to function adequately? 2,000 calories per day is the very rough average; however the number of calories a person needs can vary widely. The number of calories your body needs is based on your height, weight, gender, age, and activity level. A person who exercises every day will need significantly more calories than someone who is sedentary because they are burning a great deal more calories. A health and wellness expert can help you figure out how many calories

For more information or advice about calories contact your Wellness Coordinator by calling

1.800.327.2255

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you should aim to consume each day if you want to maintain, lose, or gain weight.

Although an obsession with calorie counting can be counter-productive, maintaining a healthy weight is important as obesity is linked with several serious medical conditions including an increased risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, and some cancers. The best way to keep calories working for you instead of against you is to maintain a healthy diet and fit in exercise a few times a week.

Since most of us lead busy lives and are forced to eat on the run quite often, we wanted to leave you with some simple everyday tips on cutting out unnecessary calories and sneaking in ways to burn extra calories throughout the day.

Avoid Extra Calories:

- Don't eat in front of the TV. People eat an average of 288 extra calories when watching television while they eat
- Eat a simple salad. When you pile on dressing, croutons, cheese, and nuts the calories really add up. Instead, pack your salad with fresh veggies and lean protein such as chicken.
- Cook food at home. Typically the home made version of a dish compared with what is prepared at a restaurant has significantly fewer calories.
- Switch to smaller plates. The bigger your plate is, the more food you put on it.
- Replace the guacamole with salsa. This will save you 150 calories per serving.
- Order your pizza with double sauce and light cheese.
- Refrigerate soups, gravies, and stews. This will enable the fat to rise to the top and you can then easily scrape it off.
- Exchange mayo for mustard on sandwiches.

- Go easy on alcohol especially mixed drinks; they can weigh in at 700 calories each.
- Order the Kid's size when you are eating fast food.

Burn Extra Calories:

- Take the stairs. Studies show that by walking two more flights of stairs each day, you could lose 6 pounds in a year.
- Stand up while at your desk. Sitting burns 63 calories per hour, while standing burns 127 calories per hour.
- Sit on a stability ball at home. It will engage your core and you can still sit and pay bills, return emails, check mail, etc.
- Plan an event each weekend that gets you up and moving. Visiting a zoo, exploring a new city, and checking out a farmer's market all result in an enjoyable calorie burn.
- Park in the farthest spot away from the building.
- Wash dishes by hand. You will burn 35 more calories that when you just place them in the dishwasher.
- Stretch first thing in the morning and right before you go to bed.
- Play with a child. Just chasing them around will have you burning some serious calories. Add in some time at the playground and you will rev up the burn even more.
- Take an evening stroll. Instead of watching TV after dinner, take a leisurely walk while the weather is still nice.
- Watch a funny video. Laughing engages your core and burns a few extra calories.

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