

Counting Calories: Calories In, Calories Out

A calorie is a unit of heat energy required to raise the temperature of one gram of water 1 degree centigrade from 14.5 to 15.5 degrees Centigrade. Calories are used to measure the energy in food as well as the energy produced or stored or used by living organisms. Do you remember that from junior high health or science class? No, of course not. You memorized it for a test and then forgot it because it doesn't mean anything unless you apply it to the foods you eat and the energy you expend. Think of it this way... Each pound of fat that you carry on your body is made up of about 3500 calories of stored energy. It is stored because you have not used it as energy. Calories taken in through food but not released as part of the energy needed in daily living are stored as fat on the body.

Calorie Needs

The recommended daily calorie intake (if you are of normal weight) is 1940 calories a day for women and 2550 calories a day for men. These recommendations are intended for those who do not practice a daily exercise routine. Actually, even if you are too busy to exercise routinely, the calorie recommendations are generous. However, if you are overweight, you will need to eat less than these recommended amounts in order to lose your targeted number of pounds. A healthy decrease in caloric intake should allow you to lose about two pounds a week.

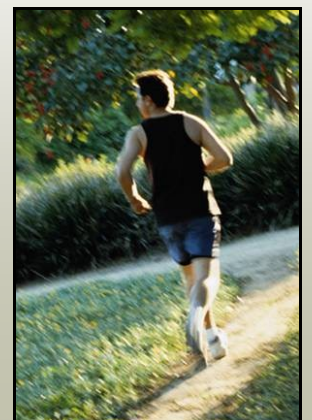


Caloric needs are based on energy demands related to age, body size, activity, and gender. Infants and small children have different caloric needs than adults. Pregnant or nursing females need more calories than other females. As adults age, their caloric needs decrease because they are not as energetically active.

However, it is estimated that in the United States 35 percent of adults eighteen years of age and older are overweight or obese (excess energy storage) based on weight for height standards. This trend is due to an increased intake of high calorie foods and a decrease of energy expenditure. We simply aren't counting calories when we take them in as food or when we burn them as energy. Taking in more than the recommended daily calorie intake is okay from time to time, but over time, unused calories are stored as fat.

Burning Calories

Everything your body does burns calories (expends energy). Respiration, blood circulation, maintenance of body temperature, food digestion, and other quiet functions of the body burn about two thirds of the calories expended every day. The activities of daily living can account for the other third. However, in the United States, modernization and mechanization has replaced many of the ongoing activities formerly required to acquire food, shelter, and comfort. In some respects, Americans live too well. Routine activities of daily life are replaced by hectic schedules, long days, little social time, less sleep, and little active recreation.



Counting Calories: Calories In, Calories Out, cont.

Burning Calories, cont.

So, while most of the rest of the world is worried about getting enough calories to survive from day to day, Americans are not worried enough about losing weight and exercising more.



The media is saturated with fad diets and fad exercise equipment. Everybody is talking about it, but the problem is spreading like a national waistline. The obesity epidemic has now reached children ages eighteen and under. It is estimated that 20% of the children in the United States are overweight or obese.

Too few individuals are counting the calories (in the food consumed and the energy expended on a daily basis), and one out of three Americans is facing serious health concerns related to weight. You can start counting your calories right now. Want to know what your personal calorie intake should be? Go online to www.mypyramid.gov and click on "MyPyramid Plan." Put in your age, height, weight, and exercise level and receive an instant food calorie plan calculated to assist in weight loss and maintain the recommended nutrients from each of the five food groups. Find out about foods that are dense in nutrients and flavor but light on calories. Add some exercise to your weekly regimen. Calories in, calories out...

For more information on calorie intake please visit:

<http://www.answers.com/topic/caloric-intake>

<http://www.mypyramid.gov>

<http://dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/html/chapter2.htm>