

Features

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Cutting Calories Too Low Can Backfire

How many of you are cutting your calorie intake too low just to lose a few extra pounds? Or, are you having trouble eating enough calories? It may not seem like a big deal to consume a hundred or so fewer calories than you're supposed to each day, but that's a dangerous and incorrect assumption.

Eating too few calories can actually be a problem for anyone who is looking to shape up or lose weight. When you cut back on calories too much, your body is biologically programmed to protect itself from various environmental conditions including starvation. So when you don't eat enough, your body goes into starvation mode and begins hoarding every calorie it can and storing fat because it doesn't want to starve to death.

Your metabolism will actually begin to slow down in an effort to conserve energy and your body might even burn muscle and hold on to the fat. Your body considers muscle to be expendable during periods of starvation and it considers fat to be necessary to insulate your organs for survival. Eventually, you'll find that work outs become harder, injuries easier to sustain, you are exhausted all the time, you can't seem to get enough sleep, and you might get sick easier than before and experience headaches, light-headedness and reduced concentration levels.

In addition, taking in too few calories will lead to a horrible cycle of yo-yo dieting. You'll starve yourself and end up losing muscle, and when you begin to eat the right amount of calories your body will pack on the pounds in anticipation of another "famine". So, by reducing your calorie intake too low to try to "get those pounds off faster", you will actually gain weight, lose muscle mass and reduce bone strength.

What can you do to break the cycle?

Required Calories: First, keep your calories at a sustainable, healthy level for your age, weight, height, amount of exercise, sex, and body size. The **minimum** calorie levels for men and women vary depending on the source: from a minimum of 1,400 or 1,500 calories per day for everyone, to no less than 1,200 for women and 1,400 for men. There are various daily calorie calculators on the internet that will tell you approximately what you need to maintain or lose weight, you can talk to your doctor, or you can find a dietitian to consult.

Nutrition: Make sure that you eat more plant-based foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Strive for a variety to help you achieve your goals without giving up taste or nutrition. Limit the amount of fat and sugars you take in, and totally eliminate Trans fats from your diet.

Exercise: Incorporating exercise into your life allows you to lose weight and still take in a healthy level of calories. In addition, exercise helps to build muscles, which will burn fat, and strengthen bones. You will keep your metabolism higher throughout the day providing you with hours of calorie burning beyond your workout.

Reduce Your Calorie Intake Appropriately: Finally, to lose 1 pound per week, you need to eliminate 500 calories per day (3500 calories per week). For a balanced approach, eliminate these calories through a reduction in calories eaten AND an increase in daily exercise. For example, decrease calorie intake by 250 calories per day and exercise to expend (use up) the other 250 calories. Or, eat 300 less calories and burn 200 extra calories through exercise. Or, if you like food and don't want to get rid of too many calories, reduce your intake by only 100 calories per day but work hard and expend 400 calories per day through exercise. The choice is up to you, but healthy weight loss is about *calories in and calories out* and to lose 1 pound you have to get rid of 500 calories per day.

Remember that each of our choices have consequences. When you decide to cut your calories too low for your needs, the consequences may not seem apparent right now, but they will become evident in time when you experience the loss of muscle strength, decreased energy and productivity, weight gain, and overall health. Take one step at a time, be patient, and know that healthy choices create healthy results.