

Shift Your Metabolism Into Drive

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What's worse than being on a diet? Being on a diet and not seeing any results! Here are three common facts that can be misleading to dieters. Each piece of advice is accompanied by tips that will help you to learn how to eat because you're hungry, not because you think you should. So start learning how to maximize your metabolism and begin losing fat. Plus: Test your calorie IQ...

If you're trying to maximize your metabolism and lose weight, you need to understand the basic guidelines for eating well. Otherwise, you'll unknowingly undermine your own efforts and ruin your weight loss plan.

But no matter how confusing it gets, to succeed in your diet there's one simple rule you should follow: If you're not hungry, don't eat.

Commonly Misinterpreted Weight Loss Fact #1: *Your metabolic rate drops sharply when you reduce your overall caloric intake and wait long hours in between meals.*

The Basics

During the caveman days, our ancestors had to survive on a limited amount of calories. Whenever they had to go long periods with little or no food, their metabolism dropped and their body slowed down, requiring less energy to keep on going.

While having a sluggish metabolism was a good thing when mammoth meat was scarce, in modern day this fact of life can make crash diets backfire. Whenever your "calorie balance" falls more than 20% below your energy needs, your metabolism starts to drastically slow down, which means you burn fewer calories.

What exactly is a "calorie balance?" It's the amount of calories you consume in a day minus the amount of calories you burn off through exercise.

For example, if you ate 2,000 calories a day and burned off 200 through exercise, you would have a balance of 1800. Although there are definitely exceptions, most women shouldn't have a balance of less than 1,200 calories and men shouldn't have a balance of less than 1,800 calories (unless they're small for their age).

What This Really Means

Yes, you do need to eat enough calories to maximize your metabolism and ensure that your body doesn't think it's starving. But this doesn't mean you can chow down and embark on a mountainous pig-out.

Don't justify a junk-food frenzy by saying to yourself, "I'll eat this cookie just to keep my metabolism going" if you've already eaten a full meal and a host of other snacks! Remember that as long as you don't dip below 20% of your energy needs, you're eating plenty.

Commonly Misinterpreted Weight Loss Fact #2: Eating six smalls a day will provide your body with a steady stream of energy and help you maximize your metabolism.

The Basics

Eating every three hours can stave off hunger pangs and keep your blood sugar at a stable level. By eating six small meals a day instead of three big ones, you constantly provide your body with the energy it needs during the long hours between meals. If you eat snacks regularly, you won't be starving when it comes time for a meal, rendering you less likely to binge.

What This Really Means

You can't use this fact as an excuse to shove handfuls of chips into your mouth or down a bowl of ice cream every few hours.

If you decide to eat several small meals in one day, you still need to keep track of your total caloric intake.

For example, if you're aiming for 1,500 calories and you want to eat five times a day, then that means you need to limit each meal to 300 calories.

If you chow down and throw food into your mouth willy-nilly, you'll sabotage your weight loss plan. The unneeded calories that you consume will only serve to expand your waistline.

For some people, having a small meal every few hours is impractical. If you work an eight-hour shift, you may be unable to get away from your desk to prepare a little snack.

Many professionals like to come home from work and have a real sit-down dinner with their families, not a mini-meal of cottage cheese and a piece of fruit.

If you'd rather eat small meals throughout the day and it's practical for you to do so, then go for it. But if you're a three squares type, there's no need to force yourself into chopping up your beloved meals into little pieces.

From a weight loss perspective, as long as you stay within your daily calorie budget and don't get too hungry, it shouldn't matter if you eat three regular or six small meals a day.

Pay attention to your body's hunger signals, not what time it is, to determine when and how much to eat.

Commonly Misinterpreted Weight Loss Fact #3: Breakfast is the first opportunity you have to maximize your metabolism and provide your body with the energy to start your day. A good breakfast will help you stay full throughout the morning and prevent you from binging on unhealthy foods before lunchtime

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The Basics

When your body goes long hours without any food, your metabolism slows down. While the 10-12 hours between dinner and breakfast is by no means a famine, it's enough to slow your metabolism down slightly.

If you eat breakfast, you can get your sluggish metabolism back up to speed. A study in *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* reported that those who didn't eat breakfast had a BMI of 27 (considered overweight), while those who ate breakfast three times a week had a healthy BMI of under 25.

What This Really Means

If you wake up and your body's telling you that it's not hungry, don't even consider putting food in your mouth. If you're not hungry right when you get out of bed, you'll probably be hungry within the next two hours – eat then, when you really want food.

Don't consume unwanted calories because you've read that eating breakfast will maximize your metabolism. It's perfectly fine to wait one or two hours after waking up before eating.

All that really matters is that you don't let yourself grow ravenous before lunch. And don't use this fact as an excuse to pig out!

When scientists say that eating a healthy breakfast can help you lose weight, they don't mean that you can gorge yourself on stacks of pancakes, hoards of greasy hash browns and sugar-filled coffee drinks. Make sure that your breakfast includes a mix of whole grains, protein and healthy fats.

To maximize your metabolism and fuel weight loss, it's crucial that you refrain from twisting diet advice around to mean that you can eat all day and gorge on whatever you want. Learning to eat when you're truly hungry, not when the clock tells you to, is a skill that will keep your waistline down and rev up your metabolism – no dieting required!

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