

Cold, Hard Facts About Calories

From [Jennifer R. Scott](#),

Calories Still Count

Why do you gain weight if you eat too much sugar? Because you're eating too many calories. Exchange those "bad carbs" for "good carbs" that are better for you -- and happen to have fewer calories -- and you'll lose weight.

Bottom line: If you eat more calories than you need, you'll gain weight. Any successful weight loss method comes down to taking in fewer calories and burning extra calories with exercise.

Put it in Perspective

If you've met someone who claims they can eat anything and as much as they want and then burn it all off later with a good workout, you've got another thing coming! It just can't be done.

For example, according to [calorie-count.com](#), a McDonald's double cheeseburger contains 460 calories...

To burn off the calories in just that *one* sandwich, the average 150-pound person would have to do moderate-intensity aerobics for an hour!

Add on a shake and order of fries and you might as well cancel any plans you had for the half-a-day you'll need to spend at the gym to un-do that one meal! Shocking, huh?

More Calories In = Fewer Calories Out?

Some research has suggested that eating too many calories at a time may actually make it more difficult for your body to shed excess weight when you exercise.

In the example before, if you over-eat regularly, you may not use those 400-odd calories in your hour-long aerobics session... you may actually burn fewer calories than someone who ate less.

Consider Your Caloric Goals

The average recommended caloric intake for losing weight is about 1,500-1,700 calories each day, (Most experts recommend 1,500 calories as a good weight loss diet.) but it does vary according to your weight and activity level.

To begin, you will need to [calculate your Basal Metabolic Rate](#) in order to assess how many calories you need to eat each day to function. The formula considers both your weight and activity level.

Once you do this, you can begin identifying ways [to cut back on the calories](#) that are in excess of your needs.

Many people may assume the more weight they need to lose, the more calories they should cut. It's actually the other way around: The more you weigh now, the more calories you can -- and should -- eat. As you lose weight, you should cut more calories.

For example, a 210-pound person cannot subsist on 1,500 calories a day. But if that 200-pound person continues to lose weight, she can eventually cut down to that level.

A Word to the Wise

While you may find a number of 1,200 calorie diets around, it's important to remember that cutting your calories too low may actually lead to weight plateaus.

There is a "starvation mode" phenomenon that happens where your body actually withholds the calories you take in for later use -- basically, it saves them up because it "thinks" you're starving. You could end up eating much less and weighing the same ... *and* you could do serious damage to your health.