

# How to Calculate Your Caloric Intake and Use it to Lose Weight

From [Jennifer R. Scott](#),  
Your Guide to [Weight Loss](#).  
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## Question:

How many calories should I eat if I want to lose weight?

## Answer:

### It's Relative

Technically, there's no magic number of calories we should all eat each day to lose weight. While most people can lose weight eating around 1,500 calories, you can assess your own personal caloric needs with a little math.

### Why Estimate Your Caloric Needs?

To estimate how many calories you should consume in order to *maintain your weight*, you'll need to do a little math. By using a simple formula called the Harris-Benedict principle, you can assess your basal metabolic rate -- also known as your BMR.

(Then, to lose weight, you'll need to cut calories or burn extra calories and shoot for a level lower than the results you get with this formula.)

### Calculate Your BMR

Your BMR is the amount of energy your body needs to function.

We use about 60 percent of the calories we consume each day for basic bodily functions such as breathing.

Other factors that influence your BMR are height, weight, age and sex.

Step one is to calculate your BMR with the following formula:

#### Women:

$655 + (4.3 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (4.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (4.7 \times \text{age in years})$

#### Men:

$66 + (6.3 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (12.9 \times \text{height in inches}) - (6.8 \times \text{age in years})$

Please note that this formula applies only to adults.

## Calculate Activity

Step two: In order to incorporate activity into your daily caloric needs, do the following calculation:

- If you are sedentary : BMR x 20 percent
- If you are lightly active: BMR x 30 percent
- If you are moderately active (You exercise most days a week.): BMR x 40 percent
- If you are very active (You exercise intensely on a daily basis or for prolonged periods.): BMR x 50 percent
- If you are extra active (You do hard labor or are in athletic training.): BMR x 60 percent

Add *this number* to your BMR.

The result of this formula will be the number of calories you can eat every day and maintain the weight you are currently at. In order to lose weight, you'll need to take in fewer calories than this result.

As you lose weight, you can re-calculate the formula to assess your new BMR.

## How to Calculate Your Caloric Intake and Use it to Lose Weight (Part 2)

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### Create a Calorie Deficit

In order to lose weight, you must create a calorie deficit. It is easier and healthier to cut back your calorie intake a little bit at a time. Every 3,500 calories is equivalent to one pound.

So, if you cut back 500 calories a day, you should lose about one pound per week. That said, If you exercise to burn off 500 calories a day you should lose approximately one pound per week. Do both, and ... you get the picture. Ideally, you *should* do a combination of both, (e.g. cut back 250 calories; burn an extra 250 calories).

Your weight loss will vary from week to week and at times you may even *gain* a little weight -- if you're working out you could be developing muscle, which weighs more than fat.

The long-term results are what matters.

Losing more than 2 pounds per week will mean the weight is less likely to stay off permanently. *Never cut back to fewer than 1,200 daily calories* without medical supervision.

To find out how you are spending your current calorie intake, keep a detailed food diary for at least one week. (You can check the calorie content of most foods at [calorie-count.com](http://calorie-count.com).)

## **Make the Cut(s)**

With careful review, you will find ways to cut back those 250 calories a day: the milk in your cereal ... the can of soda you drink daily ... the butter on your toast.

Making little changes like these will really add up in the long run.

To assess your daily caloric intake, use [calorie-count.com](http://calorie-count.com) to look up the calorie content of the foods you recorded in your food diary. Pay attention to serving sizes -- if your portion consisted of two servings, then be sure you double the calories. Track your daily intake either online or in your food journal.

Next, find foods you can do without altogether, reduce portions of, or switch for lower-calorie alternatives.

And guess what? It's easier than you think. Take it one meal at a time. Or even one food at a time. And then, one day at a time.

Tomorrow, trade whole milk for reduced-fat milk. The next day, try diet soda instead of regular. Three days in, switch to light wheat bread instead of white. All the calorie-reductions you make (and stick to) will add up in the long run.

## **Burn it Off!**

Becoming more active will knock the remaining 250 calories out. For example, a 180 pound person who walks at a brisk 3 miles-per-hour will burn just over 250 calories in 45 minutes.

Experts agree that it's easier to exercise than to cut the same number of calories that exercise shaves off. In other words, it's just plain easier for us to be a little more active than to do without more food to achieve the same calorie-reduction.

*Please check with your doctor before significantly changing your diet or starting a new exercise regime.*