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What is Metabolism?

Your body is in constant motion. You may sleep, but it never rests. The cells that make up your body are in a constant state of change. You breathe in oxygen and take in nutrients and they are delivered to individual cells through your circulatory system. Your body uses the oxygen and nutrients as energy and supplies so that it can break down and rebuild itself. The blood cells deliver the nutrients and remove unneeded or unwanted cell parts. These byproducts and toxins are either reused or discarded.

This process is called metabolism. Calories are a measure of the energy we take in as food and drink and the energy we use to live. They are metabolismâ€™s scorecard.

How are these calories used?

You use calories in three distinct ways.

* You use calories to subsist called Basal Metabolic Rate or Resting Metabolic Rate;

* You use calories to digest your food called Diet Induced Thermogenesis; and

* You use calories to move called Activity Thermogenesis.

Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR)

First, the positive news. Even at complete rest your body continues to work. Your heart is beating, you are breathing and your brain is functioning. Additionally, your muscles, skin, kidneys, liver and other internal organs are breaking down and rebuilding cells. This requires energy. In fact, about sixty percent of your daily calories are used in this process. This number is mostly related to your lean body mass or your fat free body weight. The number of calories used in this process is called the basal metabolic rate or resting metabolic rate.*

Measuring your basal metabolic rate requires expensive equipment and twelve hours of fasting since the goal is to calculate only the calories used at total rest. For less money you can get a Bio-electrical impedance analysis done and get a fairly accurate measurement of your Resting Metabolic Rate. But the quickest and easiest way to estimate it is by going line. You can find a BMR calculator here. It asks for your weight, height, age and sex. Since lean body mass is a strong predictor of BMR, online BMR estimates predict your fat free body weight and calculate the amount of calories required based on that prediction.

Women tend to have more fat than men so a womanâ€™s BMR is lower than a manâ€™s of the same weight and height. You will lose muscle as you age so any predictive model will lower your BMR as you age. Finally, your height and weight are used to estimate your lean body mass. A 5â€™4â€• 140 poun forty-five year old female will have an estimated BMR of a little over 1,300 calories. A 5â€™10â€• 180 pound forty-five year old male will have an estimated BMR of a little over 1,700 calories.

Diet Induced Thermogenesis

The second way you use calories is in the digestion of food. Your digestive system starts processing

the food and liquid you consume from the moment it enters your mouth. In fact, some of your hormones, such as insulin, increase at the mere thought of food. Digestion requires calories to breakdown your food into small enough particles for your body to use in the regeneration of its cells. Food digestion requires approximately 150 to 250 calories a day or six to twelve percent of the calories used in a day. Of course, unless you eat celery, the calories generated during digestion are a bonus but not a new weight loss program.

Activity Thermogenesis

The remaining daily calorie use is through Activity Thermogenesis. Activity Thermogenesis can be broken up into two additional categories:

The first category is the one we are all familiar with, exercise. Exercise includes activities such as running, biking, lifting weights, taking part in sports or any other physical activity done at least in part to become or remain physically fit.

The second category is a relatively new concept called Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis (NEAT). NEAT includes all activities that are not purposeful exercise but are nonetheless active.

Activity thermogenesis is the greatest way to increase the amount of calories you burn. Your ability to affect your calorie usage is almost endless between purposeful activities and NEAT. Try a variety of exercises to see what you enjoy. Experiment with hobbies that require physical effort. You will find it rewarding. You may surprise yourself and find your new endeavors are fun.

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