



Control Your WEIGHT FATE

Stay slim for life with these fat-blasting diet and exercise tips that will keep your metabolism humming through your 20s, 30s, 40s, and beyond. **by BARBARA BRODY**

Whether you've struggled with your weight since childhood or have been lucky enough to eat what you want without gaining, the reality is that it's going to get harder from here. While lifestyle changes such as long hours in the office and the demands of raising a family play a role in weight gain, biology is also at work. Starting in your 30s, your metabolism—in simplest terms, the rate at which your body utilizes calories—drops 2 to 5 percent per decade, explains SHAPE advisory board member Wayne Westcott, Ph.D., an instructor of exercise science at Quincy College. After menopause, it declines even faster. That means you need to burn at least an extra 40 calories per day or risk gaining at least 15 pounds of fat every 10 years.

That sounds scary, but don't panic: A few tweaks to your diet and exercise routine can keep the scale steady and benefit your health. "You'll lower the risk of obesity-related conditions like joint pain, some cancers, diabetes, and heart disease," says Westcott. For the best ways to combat metabolic decline, we talked to top experts and combed through recent research. Read on to find specific tips and advice for every age.



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Live Healthy

IN THE KNOW



In Your 20s

THE METABOLIC MISTAKE Following fad diets

Spending time with friends and launching your career are priorities; establishing healthy habits might not be. True, muscle mass is at its peak. And, because it requires more energy for your body to maintain it, muscle is key to keeping your metabolism up. But if you've begun to pack on a few extra pounds, you may be tempted to try a quick fix. While signing on for a juice fast or crash dieting may seem like appropriate penance following a beer-and-buffalo-wing binge, this all-or-nothing approach can backfire.

THE SMARTER STRATEGY Plan well-balanced meals, and commit to regular exercise

Give crash diets and cleanses the boot, says Melina Jampolis, M.D., a San Francisco-based internist, physician nutrition specialist, and coauthor of *The Calendar Diet*. "Not only can they make you lose muscle, but they can temporarily mess with your thyroid, which will slow bodily functions and ultimately contribute to weight gain," she says. Instead, aim to eat healthfully most of the time, and save room for splurges (a small order of fries or slice of cake) so you don't feel deprived. Remember to factor in liquid calories from coffee drinks, soda,

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“Muscle elevates your resting metabolic rate.”

and alcohol (three 12-oz beers pack at least 300 calories). Better yet, switch to calorie-free beverages and you could lose 2 to 2.5 percent of your body weight in just six months, according to research from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (That's nearly 4 pounds if you started at 150.)

Now's also the time to set the tone for your fitness future, so find a few activities you love, says Westcott. If you played sports in school, try a social league (find one at zogsports.com). At the very least, get 30 to 60 minutes of moderate aerobic activity five times a week, or work out vigorously three times a week. Strength training once or twice a week is also a good idea.

In Your 30s

THE METABOLIC MISTAKE Erratic eating and being “too busy” to work out

By now there's a good chance you're a mom, climbing the corporate ladder, or

both. Either way, your days are jam-packed, which means skipping meals, eating on the run, and not logging enough sleep. Couple these changes with a natural, age-related dip in metabolism and you may suddenly develop not-so-lovable love handles.

THE SMARTER STRATEGY Opt for protein-packed snacks, and get serious about strength training

“When you go too long without eating, you become fatigued, which research shows can alter the hormones that regulate hunger and satiety,” says NYC-based nutritionist Lyssie Lakatos, R.D.N., coauthor of *The Secret to Skinny*. Translation: You're more likely to overeat when you finally do chow down. Since things are bound to get more hectic as the day goes on, make breakfast your top priority. Start with some lean protein, such as eggs or nonfat Greek yogurt, and pair it with a slow-digesting carb like whole-grain toast or berries.

Hunger-busting snacks include a handful of nuts, veggies with 2 to 3 tablespoons of hummus, and crispbreads with lowfat cheese. A smartphone app, like the free one from myfitnesspal.com, can help you keep tabs on how those bites are adding up.

Getting more shut-eye (not easy, we know) is also important. Sleep impacts your levels of leptin and ghrelin, two hormones that regulate your appetite, and research from East Carolina University shows that skimping on slumber may alter your metabolism. Minimize middle-of-the-night awakenings by using a white noise machine and enlisting your spouse to help with that 3 a.m. baby feeding.

Free time may be precious, but strength-training at least twice a week is now essential to avoid muscle loss, says Westcott. “Muscle elevates your resting metabolic rate, meaning you burn more calories even when you're not moving.” Meanwhile, sneak in cardio whenever you can: Just four minutes of vigorous activity three times a week is enough to improve your health, finds new research from the journal *PLOS One*. But if weight loss and metabolism boosting is

your goal, make the most of a 20- or 30-minute workout with interval training. “Do one minute of intense activity, such as jogging, followed by one minute of recovery, such as walking,” says Westcott. “It won’t seem as hard, and you’ll burn 10 to 20 percent more calories than if you exercised at the same pace for the entire workout.”

In Your 40s

THE METABOLIC MISTAKE

Ignoring chronic stress

You’re probably struggling to pay a mortgage, save for your kids’ college tuition, *and* build your retirement savings. At the same time, you’re under the gun at work and you may be raising teenagers or caring for aging parents. All this stress increases production of cortisol, a hormone that increases blood glucose (sugar) levels, so you have the energy to face what your body perceives as a threat—even if you’re not actually in physical danger. “To preserve glucose levels, muscle may break down,” says

The Truth About Metabolism

Myths about this biological process abound. We asked physician nutrition specialist Melina Jampolis, M.D., to set the record straight.

<p>YOU’VE HEARD “Metabolism is totally hereditary.”</p> <p>MYTH. While you can blame (or credit) Mom and Dad for 30 to 40 percent of your resting metabolic rate (how many calories you torch when you’re not active), the rest is all on you.</p>	<p>YOU’VE HEARD “Men have faster metabolisms than women.”</p> <p>FACT. (Sorry!) Their fat-to-muscle ratio is lower, and they aren’t prone to the same hormonal fluctuations—so their engines burn 20 to 30 percent faster.</p>	<p>YOU’VE HEARD “Most thin people are blessed with high metabolisms.”</p> <p>MYTH. “There’s a small subset who just don’t convert as much food into fat, but the majority are restrained eaters or very active,” says Jampolis.</p>	<p>YOU’VE HEARD “Chili pepper can rev your metabolism.”</p> <p>FACT. ...but only by about 1 percent and only temporarily. Still, Jampolis suggests cooking with it or taking capsules that contain the active ingredient, capsaicin.</p>
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Jampolis. “Excess cortisol may also lead to insulin resistance, keeping glucose in your bloodstream instead of moving it into the cells, which makes you tired and hungry.”

Even if you’re cool as a cucumber, your ovaries start producing less estrogen as you inch closer to menopause. Testosterone also decreases, which causes the distribution of your body weight to shift—moving “from butt to gut,” says Jampolis—and overall lean mass to decline.

THE SMARTER STRATEGY

Choose calm-inducing foods and moves

If you tend to feed your feelings, postpone reaching into the cookie jar for at least 10 minutes after getting the urge, suggests Lakatos; then ask yourself if you still want to munch. Or, brew a cup of black tea: Research from University College London shows it cuts cortisol levels. Green tea is



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another excellent choice, says Lakatos. It contains theanine, an amino acid that fosters calmness and may help keep mood swings in check. Bonus: It’s been shown to maintain metabolism. Research from Switzerland suggests shooting for 5 to 6 cups a day. You’ll also want to get more fiber. Because it slows down the digestion process, consuming about 25 grams daily means you’ll absorb 90 fewer calories.

To decompress, try yoga; it lowers cortisol levels, as noted in recent research from the journal *Yoga & Physical Therapy*. Even better, many forms build muscle. If hitting the yoga mat isn’t for you, increase strength training to three times a week. “Really push yourself,” says Westcott. “Don’t only lift 20 pounds if you could be doing 30.” Sculpting more muscle can boost your resting metabolic rate by 7 percent.

It’s also smart to keep interval training. For a new twist, try high-intensity circuit training (HICT), which requires as little as 14 minutes per session, according to a new report from *ACSM’s Health & Fitness Journal*. It involves two or three 7-minute circuits that include vigorous moves (such as jumping jacks and stair climbing). Do each one for 30 seconds, pause for 10 seconds between them, and repeat the circuit.

In Your 50s and Beyond

THE METABOLIC MISTAKE

Neglecting protein and becoming sedentary

Your metabolism takes the greatest hit at menopause, which usually occurs around age 52. Thanks to all the hormonal changes, you don’t absorb protein as well as you used to and muscle loss accelerates. “Before you were losing about 5 pounds of muscle per decade,” says Westcott. “Now it’s up to 10.” But just as it’s becoming more crucial to stay active, many women in this age-group become less so, especially if they’re experiencing back or joint pain.

THE SMARTER STRATEGY

Stay active and cut calories

Keep moving! Low-impact activities like swimming, cycling, and brisk walking may even alleviate joint and muscle pain. (Just get the okay from your doc first.) Varying your cardio routine from day to day is also key, as it can help prevent

overuse injuries, says Westcott. And stick with strength training (three times a week) as you get older if you want to stay strong.

To stay slim, find some ways to trim calories at every meal, says Lakatos: “Eat three fewer bites, cook with less oil or butter, or have an extra serving of veggies and half the amount of starchy foods like pasta or potatoes.” Extra protein is also essential for warding off weight gain, so pack enough healthy sources—such as fish, lean meat, and lowfat dairy—into your diet. (Multiply your body weight in pounds by .7g to figure out how much you should be consuming each day.) An ideal time to protein-load is after workouts, says Jampolis. “You have a 30-minute window when your body will absorb the most amino acids, which are the building blocks of muscle,” she explains. Aim for about 20 grams right after your cooldown; try a smoothie made with fat-free milk, fruit, and a scoop of whey protein powder.

Whatever you do, know that your efforts will ultimately impact how you look *and* how you feel. “A 50-year-old can function like a 70-year-old or a 30-year-old,” says Westcott. “It’s up to you.”