



Calories: Fuel for Your Body

Calories are the energy in food. Your body has a constant demand for energy and uses the calories from food to function, fueling your every action, from fidgeting to marathon running. The calories you eat are either converted to physical energy or stored within your body as fat.

Tipping the scale

If you eat more calories than you burn, you gain weight. If you eat fewer calories than you burn, you lose weight.

Because 3,500 calories equals about 1 pound of fat, you need to burn about 3,500 calories to lose 1 pound. So, in general, if you cut about 500 to 1,000 calories a day from your typical diet, you'd lose about 1 to 2 pounds a week.

Saving calories by cutting high-calorie, low-nutrition items

Skipping one or two high-calorie items per day is a good place to start. For example, you could skip your morning latte or your sweet tea at lunch. Think about what you eat and drink each day and identify items you could cut out.

Swapping high-calorie foods for lower calorie options

Simple substitutions can make a big difference when it comes to cutting calories. For example, you can replace your morning latte with a cup of hot coffee with cream. Swap out that sweet tea at lunch for water flavored with fresh lemon. Snack on air-popped popcorn instead of chips.

Reducing your portion sizes

Twice the amount of food means twice the number of calories. It's common to underestimate how much you're eating. At the beginning of a meal, take slightly less than what you think you'll eat. If you're still hungry, eat more vegetables or fruit. Eat from plates, not packages. Eating directly from a container gives you no sense of how much you're eating. Seeing food on a plate or in a bowl keeps you aware of how much you're eating. Consider using a smaller plate or bowl.

Putting it all together

Replacing high-calorie foods with lower calorie alternatives and reducing your portion sizes can help you cut calories and improve weight control. For a successful – and sustainable – weight management plan, you also need to increase your physical activity. Combining regular activity and healthy eating will best help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Source:

1. **Balancing calories.** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/calories/>. Accessed Feb. 8, 2018.
2. **Hall KD, et al. Quantification of the effect of energy imbalance on bodyweight.** *Lancet*. 2011;378:826.

www.commonhealth.virginia.gov

The contents of the CommonHealth weekly emails may be reprinted from an outside resource in the area of health, safety, and wellness and is intended to provide one or more views on a topic. These views do not necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth of Virginia, CommonHealth, or any particular agency and are offered for educational purposes. If you have questions or concerns about this article, please email us at wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov