

7 Secrets to Revving Up Your Metabolism

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Is there anything you can do to jump-start a sluggish metabolism? Absolutely! Your body may not be burning calories quickly due to poor eating habits and a sedentary lifestyle. Fortunately, you can provide the tools it needs to boost your metabolism back to normal. Use these tips to rev up your inner engine and unlock your true weight-loss potential. Plus: What's your calorie IQ?

Simply put, if there are things you are doing to slow your metabolism down, then there must be things you can do to speed it back up again.

That said, if your body's engine is already running at full-speed, there's little you can do to boost your fat-burning potential – you're already at your peak. But if your tank is continually running on half-empty, you definitely have room for improvement. Use these seven tips to rev up your metabolism.

Ladies, start your engines!

Secret #1: Early to bed makes you a slim girl.

Believe it or not, the number of zzz's you catch can have a big effect on your waistline. Research shows that sleep-deprivation can put your hunger and appetite hormones out of whack. *Leptin*, an appetite-suppressing hormone, decreases in adults who are sleep-deprived while *ghrelin*, a hunger-increasing hormone, spikes. This means double trouble for your fat cells: You end up eating more than you really need, leaving you with extra pounds to show for it.

How much sleep do you need to avoid this frustrating problem? While some people swear they can get by on just a few hours, experts recommend that you get 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep each night. Just in case you're one of those people who swear they thrive on less sleep, take heed: A four-year joint study by the University of Wisconsin and Stanford University found that adults who regularly slept for only five hours a night increased their levels of hunger-inducing ghrelin by 14.9% and lowered their levels of appetite-suppressing leptin by 15.5%.

Getting into a good sleep routine may take a little work, but it's worth the effort.

Secret #2: Early to rise starts your metabolism off right.

Does your morning ritual consist solely of showering, brushing your teeth and getting dressed? If so, you're skipping two very important things that could boost your metabolism.

The first is to eat breakfast... and coffee doesn't count. Skipping that bowl of oatmeal might sound harmless, but you're missing the first opportunity of the day to jump-start your metabolism. Think of it in literal terms: Breakfast is "breaking" the overnight "fast" your body was in to conserve calories. Eating – especially a balanced breakfast – stimulates your metabolism. Translation: Eat breakfast each and every day.

The second key to starting your morning off right is exercise. Sure, you might struggle to pull off those cozy sheets (who doesn't?), but it's a battle worth winning. Why? Exercising in the morning boosts your metabolism. As a result, you'll burn more calories throughout the day simply doing the same old stuff you always do – who wouldn't want that? Even a 20-minute walk or jog will make a difference.

So skip that second cup 'o joe and strap on your walking shoes instead.

Secret #3: The more you move, the more you'll lose.

Speaking of exercise, you should do it every day. Cardiovascular exercise (running, swimming, aerobics, walking) stimulates your metabolism, helps you burn tons of calories and can even temporarily suppress your appetite post-workout.

But don't let cardio get all the metabolic-boosting glory. Weight-training is very important, too, since it tones your muscles and boosts lean tissue mass, which burns more calories per pound than fat. The more lean muscle tissue you have, the more calories you burn each day.

Also, don't be afraid to exercise more than once a day. Breaking up a 60-minute workout into two 30-minute (or three 20-minute) sessions is not only convenient, but according to recent research, it may help you burn more fat.

Secret #4: Eat all day to keep weight gain at bay.

Not to be taken literally, “eat all day” means that you should be eating more snacks or smaller meals instead of gorging on large meals. Eating five or six small meals throughout the day keeps a steady stream of energy available to your body. This boosts both your metabolism and your brain power. Keep healthy snacks (fruits, veggies, nuts, yogurt) with you and graze throughout the day as needed. Just be sure your main meals are smaller to accommodate all this snacking, or you’ll load up on extra calories you don’t need.

A big weight-loss no-no is skipping meals. Dieters often try to get that extra weight loss edge by cutting entire meals instead of just cutting calories throughout the day. However, this is actually counterproductive. Skipping meals forces your metabolism to slow down and conserve calories to compensate for the lack of food. When you finally do eat, your body remembers that it went for a long time without food and will store more calories in preparation for the next time you’re going to starve it. Stay off this roller-coaster by eating at regular intervals throughout the entire day.

Secret #5: Raise a glass to drinking yourself skinny.

Dehydration is a funny thing. While the number on the scale may be favorable when you haven’t had enough water, you’re actually risking major weight gain by not drinking enough. The problem is that being dehydrated can actually trick your brain into thinking you’re hungry, so instead of reaching for a cold one (water, that is) you reach for whatever snack is nearby.

A simple exercise in math may help illustrate the importance of hydration:

8 ounces of water = 0 calories

1 candy bar from the office vending machine = 270 calories

Swapping that candy bar for a glass of water, then waiting 20 minutes to see if you were really hungry in the first place = priceless

Give your body a break from processing all those fatty calories and grab a glass of ice-cold water instead. Some experts even claim that your body burns extra calories as it works to raise the temperature of that icy water up to your internal body

temperature. It's a controversial claim and one that we may be bickering over for only a few extra calories, but I say why not? It's refreshing, it's hydrating and you'll burn calories on your walk over to the water cooler.

Secret #6: Set your metabolism on fire with spicy foods.

Spicing up your meals may do more than just add great flavor. "Hot" foods, such as jalapeños, chile peppers and spices (like curry and cayenne), may actually increase body temperature. Body temperature and metabolism are directly related: As you burn energy, heat is released. As the theory goes, by increasing your internal body temperature, spicy foods may temporarily raise your metabolism and stimulate the use of stored fat as energy. Experts go back and forth on this theory, stating that it's not enough of a boost to make a difference.

However, researchers do agree that eating spicy foods can increase feelings of satiety. And the sooner you're satisfied at a meal, the quicker you'll stop eating. You can easily save yourself 100 calories at a meal by taking a few less bites, so pile on the hot sauce.

Secret #7: You can count on calcium for an extra boost.

A large body of research shows that calcium, an essential mineral, can actually boost your basal metabolic rate, which in turn can help tremendously with your weight-loss efforts. In a National Dairy Council-funded study, researchers found that a high-calcium, low-calorie diet can boost fat loss by 42%, compared to only 8% for a solely low-calorie diet.

In addition to safeguarding your waistline, studies also show that dairy lovers are less likely to suffer from metabolic syndrome. The hallmarks of this condition include high blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides, as well as poor blood sugar control and increased abdominal obesity – all factors that increase risk of diabetes and heart disease.

If you don't eat enough calcium-rich dairy foods, such as yogurt, skim milk and low-fat cheeses, you should either start adding them to your diet or consider taking a daily calcium supplement.

How Calorie-Conscious are You?

One of the great secrets of weight loss isn't such a secret after all - limit the amount of calories you consume each day and eat the right amount of calories for your body and you'll lose weight. While calorie-counting seems like a tedious task, having a basic knowledge of which foods will send you into a diet trap isn't. So just how calorie-conscious are you?

Take this calorie quiz: <http://www.lifescrypt.com/quiz/quiz.asp?bid=54952>

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