Calorie Countdown

A little food mathematics can add up to lost pounds.

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Counting calories isn't easy, but it can lead to a leaner you. Not sure how to get started? No worries. Just follow these basic principles.

If you want to burn more calories, exercise to build muscle mass. The more muscle you have, the more calories you burn, even at rest, says clinical nutritionist Tara Coleman.

Because men have a higher percentage of muscle mass, they typically have a higher metabolic rate than women—that is, men burn more calories at a faster rate. That is why the average caloric intake requirement for men each day is 2,300 to 2,500 calories and only 1,800 to 2,000 for women.

But while you can't change your gender, you can jump-start your metabolism. Simply add more cardiovascular exercises, such as jogging and cycling, to your daily routine, and watch what you eat.

"When it comes to weight loss, a pound of fat is 3,500 calories," Coleman says. "If you want to lose a pound a week, just eat about 500 less calories each day."

Once you've reached your ideal weight, it's important to eat enough calories to maintain it. In other words, don't burn more calories than you eat.

To find out the specific number of calories you need each day, you must calculate your resting metabolic rate (RMR), which is the rate you burn calories when your body is not in motion—for example, while sitting or resting. But to calculate the most accurate RMR, you have to head over to your local fitness facility or make an appointment with a nutritionist.

Weight management may not be quick and easy, but it can be less challenging if you start counting calories, exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet. And you won't need advanced calculus to do it.

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