

Healthy Eating Behaviors

For most of us this is the non-competitive time of the year and the best time to correct poor eating habits. Without the added stress of racing, we can focus more on nutrition and keeping the winter weight off. I am not talking about a special diet where you only eat grapefruits and cottage cheese. I am talking about a significant change in your eating behavior and your lifestyle. While the goal is to lose weight and improve our nutrient intake, we want to make sure that the weight lost must be fat without the loss of lean muscle. We must make sure metabolism is brought back into balance.

Metabolism is more than just burning calories. Metabolism can be either anabolic, building or repairing tissue, or catabolic, breaking down tissue. To reach desired ideal weight, we must learn how to balance both the anabolic and catabolic process.

Each time a person loses weight through skipping meals and cutting out calories the body gets stuck in a catabolic state and we begin to lose muscle with the fat. With the metabolism stuck in the catabolic phase, it begins to shut down as a response to being underfed. At that point we are fighting against thousands of years of hormonal evolution, that when under the stress of under-eating, the body wants to store fat. So instead of fighting this mechanism, we must learn how to use the body's chemistry to our advantage.

So how should we change our eating behavior to lose fat? The first step is to record every morsel of food you eat. Keep a food journal consisting of when, what, and how much you ate throughout the day. I recommend doing this for at least three days, two days where you follow your normal workout schedule and one rest day. You should also keep the journal with you at all times so you can write down exactly what you ate when you ate it. Don't rely on your memory at the end of the day to recall every morsel of food you ate throughout the day. To put it simply, if it goes in your mouth, it should go in the journal. By accurately assessing what you eat and how often you eat, we can start to make the changes required to control your hormonal response to food.

To control the hormonal response to food, you must eat the right type of food at least four times a day in the right portion. By doing this you will be able to control your blood sugar levels and the glucagons, insulin, and cortisol response to the food you eat. The biggest hurdle in this plan is getting used to the idea of eating even when you don't feel hungry to keep the metabolism stoked. This doesn't mean eating donuts and fried chicken five times a day. The focus should be on complex carbs such as vegetables, fruits, and minimally processed grains; proteins such as lean meats and low-fat dairy products; and healthy fats that are found in nuts and other plant sources.

Often times our busy schedules and lifestyles make it hard to plan out all of our meals but a good starting point is to get used to the idea of eating healthy, reasonable amounts, throughout the day. You want to eat like a gazelle, just nibbling throughout the day. This will prevent you from suffering through the peaks and valleys of blood sugar levels

through out the day. The peaks result in too much insulin being released and the lean tissue is overfed leading to the excess being stored as fat. The valleys lead to insufficient insulin production and the lean tissues are underfed which leads to snack cravings. In addition, eating too little increases cortisol release due to stress which also leads to increases in fat storage.

To lose fat without muscle, you can not be too extreme with reducing carbohydrates. After all, carbohydrates provide us with the energy to train and live our lives. What is needed is carbohydrate management. By reducing carbohydrates 20-percent of your daily needs for 2 days, and then replenishing the glycogen in the muscle by eating 100 percent of your carbohydrate needs on the third day will allow for fat loss without muscle loss. Typical fat losses for this program can be as much as 1 -2 pounds per week, while keeping the muscles well fed. This three day cycle will allow you to maintain a balance of catabolic and anabolic processes. Keep in mind, this carbohydrate reduction should only be done during the non-competitive time of the year. You should never reduce your carbohydrate intake during a period of competition, but you should continue with breaking your meals down into 4 to 5 feedings a day.

Changing your eating behavior will do more for you than just lose weight. You will also feel better, have more energy, and be able to train more effectively.

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