

BE A CALORIE BURNING machine

It seems as though everyone knows at least one person who can eat anything in sight, whether it's healthy or not, and not put on a pound. Yet others gain weight by the sheer smell of chips. If this sounds familiar, there is hope. **TEXT: BERNADETTE ABRAHAM**

NEVER AGAIN WILL YOU have to place the blame on heredity and genetics to rationalise the unfairness of your metabolism. Fortunately, this belief is false. In fact, your genetic make-up has very little effect on your metabolism and, with the proper knowledge and understanding, you can control your own metabolism.

First and foremost, it's important to understand the concept of metabolism. Simply stated, it is the rate at which your body burns through food. Since your body burns calories around the clock, even while you sleep, it is very important to regularly feed your body with the proper nutrients. Also, any form of exercise in addition to your normal daily activities will require a greater consumption of calories.

As with genetics, many people believe that age is the culprit for their slow metabolisms. Unfortunately, unless we perform regular strength exercises, this is somewhat true. We lose more than one-half pound of muscle every year after the age of 25, which consequently decreases the metabolic rate. However, the muscle loss that often accompanies the ageing process can be markedly delayed through regular strength training exercises and physical activity.

Furthermore, many metabolic diseases can interfere with metabolism; the two most common types being diabetes and thyroid disorders. Diabetics must concern themselves with regulating the blood sugar levels. The thyroid, which is a small gland in the neck, produces a hormone that regulates the rate of metabolism.

If you've been diagnosed with either of these conditions, and they are well under control through medical intervention, there is

good news. A sound programme consisting of exercise, proper nutrition and frequent visits to your endocrinologist can help you regain control of your metabolism and lose the unwanted weight.

Stress is another factor that can affect your metabolism. When you undergo any kind of stress, the 'stress hormone' cortisol is produced to self-preserve the body. Cortisol is catabolic, meaning it breaks down muscle tissue to help fuel the body under abnormal conditions. When muscle tissue is reduced, the metabolism is at stake. However, exercise releases feel-good chemicals called endorphins that lower the levels of cortisol in the blood stream. So get up, move around, and let your body reap the benefits of exercise!

BOOST YOUR METABOLISM

In order to make your metabolism as efficient as possible, the following factors must be addressed.

Muscle = metabolism

An increase in muscle tissue causes a corresponding increase in our metabolic rate. If we compare two people with the same body weight, the person who is more muscular burns more calories than the other, even at rest. In fact, our skeletal muscles are responsible for more than 25 per cent of our calorie use.

Since muscle is a metabolically active tissue, the more muscle you have, the faster your metabolism will be – guaranteed! For this reason, resistance training is essential if you want to increase your metabolism and achieve long-term fat loss.

Meal frequency

If you've ever been camping and sat around a campfire, you'll clearly understand the way the metabolism functions. In essence, to keep the flames burning, you must regularly throw in logs or else the fire will extinguish itself. On the other hand, if you throw in too many logs at once, the fire will get smothered. The same analogy applies to your metabolism.

If you eat too little or too much at once, your metabolism becomes sluggish. You must constantly provide your body with the necessary nutrients or else your 'inner-fire' will slow down or be smothered.

Skipping meals and frequent bouts of calorie-restrictive diets are detrimental to your health in the long run, and have negative effects on your metabolism. Furthermore, a series of hormonal imbalances can occur as a result, which lowers the production of the metabolism regulating thyroid hormones T₃ and T₄. This decrease can slow down the metabolism even further. The solution is to eat smaller and more frequent meals every few hours, instead of eating two or three larger meals per day.

Food selection

What you eat is just as important as how often you eat. Energy is required to perform your daily activities, such as walking to the refrigerator and eating leftovers. Calories are also expended when digesting your food. This is known as the thermic or heat producing effect of food.

Not all foods require the same amount of energy to be digested. For example, lean proteins (chicken breast, fish and egg whites) and complex carbohydrates (potato, oatmeal and whole grains) require more energy to be

spent than fatty foods. Fats are relatively simple to break down in the body, and therefore only give a 5 per cent metabolic boost. Meanwhile, complex carbohydrates provide 10 per cent, and lean proteins provide a 20 to 25 per cent metabolic boost. By

substituting high fat foods with more thermic foods found in proteins and carbs, the act of eating in itself becomes a metabolic stimulus.

To sum up, a combination of resistance training and moderate aerobic exercise, coupled with proper nutrition every few

hours can really help boost your metabolism. And you too one day can be considered the 'eat anything and not get fat' type of person.

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DO METABOLISM BOOSTERS WORK?

Today's market is saturated with diet pills, energy enhancements and metabolism boosters. Pick any ailment, and sure enough the remedy can be found on a shelf somewhere in pill or liquid form. It is a sad reality; and consumers are not to be blamed. If an advertisement guarantees quick and easy fat loss, wouldn't you want to give it a try?

Most metabolism boosters contain sources of caffeine and ephedrine, a drug that has been associated with strokes and even deaths. The combination of these stimulants can elevate the metabolic rate; however it is not a long term solution for fat loss. They have a diuretic effect that causes you to lose water weight. Although the scale may show a decrease in body weight, it is surely not a reduction in body fat.

Another side effect that is widely overlooked is their addictive properties. Caffeine is the perfect example. Many people need their morning fix of coffee or else they begin to feel symptoms like irritability, shakiness, fatigue and even headaches. Regular use of these over-the-counter drugs can cause the body to build a tolerance, which can lead to larger and more frequent doses.

The intent here is not to cause worry, but to inform you of the realities of taking supplements and other drugs that are not prescribed by your doctor.