

## Making the Most of Your Metabolism

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“It’s my metabolism!” Sound familiar? If you’re carrying some extra pounds and having a hard time losing them, it’s tempting to put the blame on a sluggish metabolism. But just what is your metabolism, and why is it so important?

Your metabolism involves a complex network of hormones and enzymes that not only convert food into fuel but also affect how efficiently you burn that fuel. The process of metabolism establishes the rate at which we burn our calories and, ultimately, how quickly we gain weight or how easily we lose it. Of course, not everyone burns calories at the same rate. Your metabolism is influenced by your age (metabolism naturally slows about 5% per decade after age 40); your sex (men generally burn more calories at rest than women); and proportion of lean body mass (the more muscle you have, the higher your metabolic rate tends to be). So how can you increase your metabolism?

**Exercise.** Working out is the best way to raise your metabolism. During activity, your body demands more energy, and your metabolism is temporarily increased to meet those demands. Cardio or aerobic activities help keep your metabolism elevated for several hours afterwards, increasing the number of calories burned.

**Strength train.** Strength training helps increase the percentage of lean muscle mass. Since muscle burns more calories than fat – even while at rest – the more muscle you have, the higher your resting metabolic rate. This means that your body will be burning more calories just to sustain you. Every pound of muscle in our bodies burns 35 calories a day, while each pound of fat burns just 2 calories a day. Both traditional weight training and Pilates are great for building lean, strong muscles that will boost your metabolism.

**Eat.** Though it may sound contradictory, you have to eat (healthy, of course!). First of all, always eat breakfast. This helps jump start your metabolism for the day. Secondly, eat five or six smaller meals a day as opposed to the traditional three big meals. This will help your metabolism remain in constant working mode. When you put too many hours between meals, your metabolism actually slows down to compensate. Finally, no crash dieting! Skipping meals and crash dieting bring your metabolism to a screeching halt. When you greatly restrict calories, your body wants to conserve energy so it slows down your metabolism. This is why many crash dieters see initial weight loss but quickly regain the weight.

Don’t be discouraged if you didn’t inherit a fast metabolism; heredity does make a difference. Some people just burn calories at a slower rate than others. But by following the simple tips above, you can give it a boost and soon be on your way to a faster metabolism.

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