

Chapter 5. A Calorie Is a Calorie, or Is It?

We've been talking a lot about calories. Why? Because the number of calories you eat and drink, and use up through daily activities, is closely associated with your weight. Does it matter what types of foods the calories come from? Yes and no.

When it comes to calories and managing your weight, the answer is no. A calorie is a calorie. Choosing healthy foods is important, and we'll address that in the next chapter, "Calories + Nutrients = Food." But first you need to learn about calories: what a calorie is, how to count calories, and how to set your calorie goal. This information will help you assess how close you are to your calorie goal. Then, you will be able to choose the kind of changes that will get you on your way to a Healthier You.

We know that most people don't like to count calories. It may feel like a daunting, overwhelming, and time-consuming task. We hear you. That is why **A Healthier You** is going to provide you with tools that will make it manageable for you to count calories and follow a healthy eating plan that you can make part of your everyday lifestyle.

What is a calorie?

A Calorie is the amount of heat needed to raise the temperature of a liter of water 1 degree. Sure, it was hard to understand when your science teacher explained it. Relax. It is just a scientific way to measure energy. That said, what do you need to know about calories? Just a few things: Think about what you regularly eat, what your calorie needs are, and how to count calories. It takes approximately 3,500 calories below your calorie needs to lose a pound of body fat. It takes approximately 3,500 calories above your calorie needs to gain a pound.

At this point, you know how many excess calories it takes to gain a pound or deficit calories to lose a pound (3,500), and you know about how many calories you need (in "My Personal Profile"). You are already on the road to a Healthier You! The next thing you need to learn is how to count calories so you can determine how many you eat each day. At first, this may seem like too much trouble, but once you get familiar with portion size and the number of calories in your favorite foods, you'll be

able to estimate how many calories you eat each day, easily, without weighing your food and without taking too much of your valuable time.

ABOUT ANTHONY



Anthony is a 56-year-old man who is 5'10" and weighs 185 pounds. Anthony is a high school teacher and track coach who spends most of his day standing at work. Anthony does some light yard work when he returns home from work each day.

Using the BMI chart on page 12, Anthony determined that he has a BMI of 27. According to the BMI chart, he is overweight.

Next, using the definitions on page 15, Anthony determined his physical activity level. Because he does some physical activity while coaching and doing light yard work each day for at least 30 minutes, he is active.

Then, Anthony, using the calorie chart on page 16, determined his estimated calorie needs based on his age and current physical activity level. This is approximately 2,600 daily calories to maintain his current weight.

How many calories do you eat each day?

Calories count—and they come from both food and beverages. When eating packaged foods (for example, frozen, canned, and some prepared foods from the grocery store), counting your calories is easy—it's on the Nutrition Facts label. When eating foods that do not have a Nutrition Facts label, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, or when eating at home or in restaurants, determining calories is more difficult. If you can't count calories because there is no Nutrition Facts label, you should pay attention to portion size.

Use the Nutrition Facts label. Most packaged foods have a Nutrition Facts label. An example of one is on the next page. You can use this tool to make smart food choices and to find out how many calories and nutrients you are actually eating. To use the label effectively to count calories, you need to **check serving size, servings per container, and calories**. Look at the serving size and the number of servings per container. How many servings are you consuming? If you are eating 2 servings, you are eating double the calories and the nutrients listed on the Nutrition Facts label.

Portion size is the amount of food eaten at one time. Serving size is the amount stated on the Nutrition Facts label. Sometimes, the portion size and serving size match; sometimes, they don't. For example, if the label says that 1 serving size is 6 cookies and you eat 3, you've eaten $\frac{1}{2}$ of a serving of cookies. More importantly, you have just reduced by half the calories listed on the Nutrition Facts label. Remember that the serving size on the Nutrition Facts label is not a recommended amount to eat; it's a simple and easy way for letting you know the calories and nutrients in a certain amount of a food. If the label helps you be more aware of how much you eat or drink—all the better!

When eating foods without a Nutrition Facts label, pay attention to how your portion size compares to a recommended amount of food from each food group. In chapter 7, "Breaking It Down," we'll show you how to do this.

Some foods prepared at the grocery store and other foods such as produce items may not have food packaging that provides nutritional information, but this information can sometimes be obtained in the store by request. Many restaurants have nutrition information on the foods they serve available at the restaurant or on their Web site. As grocery stores increase the number of prepared products that have nutrition information, it will become easier for you to make lower-calorie choices to help you control your calories every day. Don't be afraid to ask for nutrition information if you don't see it displayed at the grocery store or on the menu when eating out.

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)			
Servings Per Container 2			
Amount Per Serving			
Calories 260	Calories from Fat 120		
		% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 13g		20%	
Saturated Fat 5g		25%	
<i>Trans</i> Fat 2g			
Cholesterol 30mg		10%	
Sodium 660mg		28%	
Total Carbohydrate 31g		10%	
Dietary Fiber 0g		0%	
Sugars 5g			
Protein 5g			
Vitamin A 4%	•	Vitamin C 2%	
Calcium 15%	•	Iron 4%	
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:			
	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g
Calories per gram:			
Fat 9	•	Carbohydrate 4	• Protein 4

On the sample Nutrition Facts label above, the serving size of this food is 1 cup, and there are 2 servings in this container. There are 260 calories per serving of this food. If you eat the entire container of this product, you will eat 2 servings. That means you need to double the calories ($260 \text{ calories} \times 2 = 520 \text{ calories}$) to know how many calories you are eating. If you eat 2 servings, you will have eaten over 500 calories!

Now, you've learned how to use food packaging to help you figure out how many calories you are eating. In the following chapter, you will learn how to build healthy eating patterns using food groups. Estimating how many calories you are getting from these foods can be challenging at first. But since one of the best ways to manage your weight is to be aware of foods and beverages high in calories, being able to keep track of where your calories are coming from is an important skill that will help you for the rest of your life.

Setting your calorie goal

In chapter 4, “Where to Start,” you determined your Body Mass Index, or BMI, to assess whether you were underweight, at a healthy weight, overweight, or obese. Staying at—or getting to—a healthy weight can help us in several ways. Not only might it help us feel better and look better, but science shows it plays an important role in reducing our risk of several types of chronic diseases that can definitely interfere with our hopes for a long, healthy life.

Excess body fat leads to a higher risk for premature death, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, problems with cholesterol and triglycerides, heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, lung problems, gout, arthritis, and certain kinds of cancers.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005

There is a right number of calories for you. This number depends on your age, gender, weight, activity level, and whether you're trying to gain, maintain, or lose weight. In chapter 4, “Where to Start,” you estimated how many calories you need to maintain your weight at your current physical activity level.

If you are at a healthy weight (BMI between 19 and 24), then use the number of calories you estimated as your calorie needs based on your current physical activity level. This is the number you wrote down in “My Personal Profile.” In chapters 9 and 10, you will determine whether you are physically active enough to reduce your risk for developing a chronic disease or to maintain or achieve a healthy weight.

If you are obese, overweight, or have a high waist size and two or more risk factors (see page 13), even modest weight loss (for example, 10 pounds) has health benefits. Preventing further weight gain is very important. Eating fewer calories while increasing physical activity are the keys to controlling body weight. Simply put, eat less, move more. If you need to lose weight, aim for slow, steady weight loss by decreasing calorie intake while maintaining an adequate intake of nutrients. Next are a couple of suggestions to get you on your way.

If you need to lose weight, a reduction of 500 or more calories each day from added sugar, fat, and alcohol is a good strategy. For example, drink water flavored with lemon or lime, seltzer water, or a diet soda instead of a sugar-sweetened beverage, or use a non-caloric sweetener instead of a sweetener with calories. Together these small changes can quickly add up to 500 calories! Later on, we will give you more details on how to do this.



tip for controlling calories:

On the Nutrition Facts label, when 1 serving of a single food item contains 400 or more calories, it's high; and 40 calories is low.¹

The packaging of a food can also contain other useful information for making your food selections. For example, sometimes, foods are labeled "calorie free," "low calorie," "reduced or lower in calories," "light," or "lite." Here is a quick guide to what those words mean:

Calorie free = Less than 5 calories per serving.

Low calorie = 40 calories or less per serving.

Reduced calorie or lower in calories = At least 25 percent fewer calories than the regular version.

Light or lite = Half the fat or a third of the calories of the regular version.²

¹ Based on 2,000 calories.

² For example, if a regular cheesecake has 300 calories and 8 grams of fat per serving, then the "lite" version could have 200 calories and 4 grams of fat per serving.