

1. Calculate your daily calorie needs. According to the 2005 U.S. Dietary Guidelines, women ages 19-30 need to consume 2,000 calories, ages 31-50 need 1,800 calories, and ages 51 need 1,600 calories per day. Daily calorie needs can also be estimated using the following guidelines:

- Step #1: Take your body weight in pounds and multiply by 10 calories. Example: 150 pounds x 10 calories = 1,500 calories.
- Step #2: Take half your body weight and add it to the number from Step #1 to obtain your resting metabolic rate (the amount of calories you burn every day to breathe, pump blood and hold your pen at work). Example: 150 pounds/2 = 75 1,500 calories = 1,575 calories.
- Step #3: If you engage in resistance training at least 2 hours per week, add an additional 100 calories.
- Step #4: For every 10 minutes of cardiovascular exercise achieved, add an additional 100 calories. Example: A 150-pound female who weight trains twice per week for an hour and does 30 minutes of daily cardiovascular exercise needs an additional 400 calories, for a total of 1,975 calories per day.

2. Split your calories into 4-6 smaller daily meals. To keep your calorie-burning engine running efficiently, you should eat every 3-4 hours for a total of 4-6 small meals per day. To figure out calories per meal, divide your total calorie goal by your goal number of meals. Example: 1,475 calories / 5 meals = 295 calories per meal or snack.

3. Balance your meal plate. Approximately 25 percent of every main meal should consist of a starchy carbohydrate, such as brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, whole grain cereals and breads, corn, peas and potatoes. A protein-rich food such as non-fat cottage cheese, round steak, skinless chicken breast and fish should make up another quarter. The remaining 50 percent should be colorful fruits and vegetables.

Also, aim at consuming good portions. A ratio of food that includes one "fistful" of starch, one of protein, and two of fruits and vegetables is best.

Remember: If you are looking to lose weight, first establish how many daily calories you need to maintain weight. Then subtract 500 calories from this in order to lose about 1 pound per week. **Because it takes a 3500 calorie loss to equal 1 pound of fat.**