Mind Over Fatter

A 30-Day Overhaul of the Mindset that has Sabotaged Your Fitness and Weight-loss Success

By Gina Paolino

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The author of this book intends for this publication to provide accurate information. It is sold with the understanding that it is meant to complement, not be a substitute for, professional medical, rehabilitative, psychological, and/or health and fitness services.

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All photos are of Gina Paolino, courtesy of Bryan Paulhus and Hard Nock’s Gym in Amesbury, MA.

This book is dedicated to Mom, Dad, Gram, Nana and Bryan. Thank you for being loving and supportive through my schooling and as I’ve worked to build my business.

Also to George and Debi, my gymnastics coaches for 7 years. They treat their gymnasts like one of the family. They’ve helped me develop character and toughness that take you very far in life.

And finally to Magdita, the one who inspired me to start my business.
Welcome! Before we get started, I’d like to thank you for putting your trust in me by purchasing this System. I want to assure you that I’ve spent a great deal of time and energy researching and testing the information in this book and I have 100% confidence that it works. Before we get any further, though, I’m going to tell you a little bit about me.

My name is Gina Paolino, and I’m the owner of Home Bodies in-home fitness training. My business provides fitness training services, health and fitness coaching and consulting, and personalized exercise and nutrition plans. I also write original health and fitness articles, a monthly Newsletter, and health and fitness books like this one. You can find all these things and more at my company’s website, www.homeexercisecoach.com. I provide most of my services and programs in-home. I also work with clients at the Seacoast Family YMCA in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and at Hard Nock’s Gym in Amesbury, Massachusetts.

I am nationally certified fitness trainer, and have over eight years of experience in the health and fitness industry. I competed in gymnastics for ten years and have been a gymnastics coach for eight years. I also have a bachelor’s degree in psychology and business. One of my greatest passions is psychology and its application in behavioral change. In fact, fitness, nutrition, and psychology are all passions of mine and I spend a great deal of time researching these topics. I like to go beyond theory by testing the techniques I learn on people in the real world. My health and fitness programs consist of a blend of applications that come from the fields of biology, exercise physiology, nutrition, and psychology. All of my programs are geared toward helping people develop and maintain a healthy, fit body. My ultimate goal is for every one of my customers and clients to be healthy, in shape, and full of energy. Last, but certainly not least, I want them to look great too.

This System will lead you step-by-step in uncovering your own sources of internal motivation for exercising and eating better. You’ll also learn how you can turn the forces in your environment into sources of external motivation. This System will serve as a guide in helping you set up your own personalized health and fitness program. If you feel like you’ve tried everything to lose weight and get in shape and failed at each one, this System is exactly what you need because nothing is left to chance. This System covers all bases, including the physiology of what works and what doesn’t, mental and psychological aspects of diet and training, and the planning, implementation, and adaptation of your program over time.

This System is the only book I’ve seen that ties all the important issues together and explains them in everyday language. I feel it’s important for you to understand why these techniques work because it’s motivating to understand the purpose behind the work you’ll need to do to get in shape. I’m not going to tell you what to do or what not to do, but I am going to educate you so that you can make your own decisions.

The purpose of this System is to help you make positive, lasting changes in your life. Specifically, my goal is for you to enjoy a boost in your physical and mental health, your fitness level, and, as a result of all that, your appearance. If you decide to follow the Strategies outlined here, you will find that many aspects of your life begin to improve. It is not especially difficult to work through the Strategies in this program, but it will require a solid commitment from you. You won’t need “willpower” to make the changes I ask – you simply need to be capable of making a commitment and following instructions, and you’ll need to have patience and faith during the process. You can be assured that many before you have applied the Strategies in my System and have incredible results to show for it. This is the first time my System has been available in a comprehensive form – up until now I’ve been educating my clients through my Newsletter, my articles, and our one-on-one sessions. Now that I’ve had plenty of time to test my ideas, I feel an obligation to reach more people with this life-changing information. This System is designed to be a motivational book, a behavior modification program, and a health and fitness resource that I hope will be helpful to you and your loved ones for years and years to come.

As you prepare to start using this System, realize that there’s no reason to feel intimidated. Everything that I require as part of the program is well within the capabilities of everyday people – don’t worry, you are not going to be expected to run a marathon or deadlift 200 pounds. Those feats of stamina and strength, although impressive, are certainly not requirements for being a fit and healthy person. The only challenge I’ll pose to you is in asking you to commit yourself to this process, as it will require work on your part. As the owner of a personal training business, I would love to be able to sell you a magic pill that could instantly improve your health, your fitness, and your overall well-being. Believe me, it would make everything easier for both of us! Since nothing like that exists, I will offer you the next best thing: A science-based program that addresses physical, emotional, and psychological needs, along with my promise and personal guarantee that it works.
First, though, I have one request for you: I prefer that you don’t start dabbling in any of the Strategies you are about to learn if you’re not willing to stick with it for 30 days. Whether it’s one Strategy or all thirty that you’d like to try at the outset, your chances of making a permanent change are dramatically reduced if you don’t commit to giving it an honest try for at least a month’s time. If you go through this program just trying things halfheartedly, you won’t be able to see the value in the Strategies and they will lose their power.

For the sake of clarification, I want you to know that I have no problem with you reading through this System and deciding that you’re not ready to make any change at this time. The moment when you feel ready is your call – no one will be able to force you. Regardless of whether you’re ready to give one Strategy a go or you’d like to try the 30-day program in its entirety, I would like you to mark off the 30 days on your calendar during which you will maintain your commitment to the Strategies.

To understand the reasoning behind this request, you need a little more background on where I’m coming from. The reason I became a fitness trainer who also writes about health, fitness, and motivation is that I want to spread the life-enhancing information I have to as many people as possible. I want to be of service for things that really make a difference for people. If you pass off my System as “just another weight-loss gimmick that doesn’t work” you will detract from my mission, which is to deliver sound, expert advice to as many people as possible. When you apply my System the way it’s designed, you’ll be so successful that I know you’ll help me get the message out by spreading the word to others wanting help with their weight, health, appearance, and quality of life. So I beg you to give 100% in your attempt to apply the information contained in this System.

If you don’t feel ready at this point in your life to take a serious gander at the material, just put the program aside and come back to it later on when you’re so fed up that you’re not only willing but actually eager to make a change. Or, consider passing my System along to someone who seems ready today to work on his health and fitness. Who knows – if he does well using this System, you might be inspired to try too!

This 30-day program is about doing something nearly every day, rather than doing an extreme amount on any given day. This program isn’t a quick fix, but it will serve you well for the rest of your life if you continue to follow the principles.

Before you start working this System, keep in mind that I am requesting a 30-day commitment on your part – if you don’t think maintaining the changes is worth it or you don’t look and feel better, you can always go back to your old ways. I’m asking just 30 days during which you’ll commit to giving it an honest try. Most people find, once they get over the first 30-day hump, that exercise and eating better is definitely worth it. I’d like for you to think of this as a process of breaking an “addiction” to an unhealthy lifestyle or an unhealthy behavior. While you are in the midst of an unhealthy lifestyle, it is all you know. If you can break free from that situation and turn to look at your former lifestyle from the outside in, most likely you will realize that you don’t ever want to go back there again. As an added bonus, your new, healthier ways of living will have become habits after the first 3-4 weeks – the changes will be much, much easier to stick to at that point.

When you look at it that way, it’s no wonder why certain people seem to hit the ground running (literally!) when they start exercising and eating better. You’ve seen their profiles in the magazines – the ones who used to eat fast-food three times a day and considered a workout to be actually walking inside versus using the drive-thru – and then they became a poster-child for the local gym and the natural foods store. Along the way, they lost ten inches off their gut and gained a ton of energy and confidence. These people aren’t any “better” than you – it’s just that once they “flipped the switch” they really didn’t have the option to go back because they realized all the good feelings they had been missing out on while they were too busy neglecting their bodies. See, when you look at exercise and eating well as a means to gain more good feelings rather than as a way to lose fun and happiness, you’ll start looking at junk food and sedentary living in a different light. Sure, they can be short-term pleasures at times, but they’re always a source of pain in the end. Upon reaching that realization, the choice of what to do becomes automatic.

Okay, so if you’re with me in thinking that this health and fitness stuff might be worth it, what to do? If you’re like most Americans you want everything now, and if you could have it yesterday you would take that too. Needless to say, patience isn’t exactly a strong suit for most of us. That impatience is what sparks the fire that fuels the $45-billion U.S. weight-loss industry.

There are some products out there that claim they can help you lose 10 pounds in three days, or other impressive feats. Even if these claims are true (and everyone knows they almost always are not, or else the entire weight-loss industry would be turned on it’s head), who’s to say that you’ll keep the weight off, or that you won’t have to keep buying and using the product forever to continue enjoying the benefit?
The beauty of a behavior and lifestyle modification program like this one is that the knowledge and power you gain learning and applying the System can serve you over and over if needed, at no additional cost beyond the time you put into the process. This isn’t a pill or a gym membership that you have to keep paying for over and over, lest you fall back into being out-of-shape. And, although this System is more time-intensive than popping a pill, it’s definitely time well spent. Following the program will result in a healthier, happier, and more productive life. You’ll also become more self-sufficient and intrinsically motivated as you work this System, since you’ll begin to reap the rewards that are simply natural consequences of living healthfully. In addition to tapping sources of internal motivation, you’ll learn how to use external motivators to your advantage to reinforce the behaviors that will make your life better. Perhaps most importantly, you will stop being a victim of the forces in your environment that make it harder by the year to stay on top of your health, your fitness, and your weight.

Even though my program is simple to follow, if you don’t approach the steps systematically it’ll be easy to get distracted or feel overwhelmed. My System, when followed sequentially, is a foolproof method for putting the necessary cognitive and behavioral changes for getting fit and losing fat into action. It’s extremely powerful and worth more than its weight in gold when applied correctly. What you hold in your hands is powerful enough to finally release you from the vicious cycle of unhealthy habits that sabotage your success and your ability to experience complete happiness.

If you looked through the Contents, you might have noticed that the System includes 30 Strategies, each focusing on one key concept. If you have a history of rushing into things full-force and quitting them just as suddenly, your best bet is to make a 30-day commitment to read and focus on one Strategy a day. This will give you the chance to establish a rock-solid foundation in the Strategies. Hopefully, that process will inspire and motivate you so that you will be ready to make the commitment to actually apply the material – and applying the material is the only way that you’ll get to enjoy all the positive changes that will come into your life when you’re living healthfully. Once you’ve had the opportunity to familiarize yourself with the Strategies (your first 30-day commitment), you can start a new 30-day commitment – one that will involve working the assignments in addition to actually living the healthy habits.

Now, I realize that some of you will want to start living the healthy habits immediately. If you are determined to start your healthy lifestyle as soon as possible, you will need to skim the entire program and study the Reference section closely so that you can formulate your health and fitness goals that will become the cornerstone of your program. Once you have given yourself an overview of the information, be sure to follow the System in order and complete all of the assignments while you are in the midst of your 30-day healthier-living commitment. The Strategies in this program appear in the order they will be needed. Therefore, if you wish to take the “fast track” and keep up with reading one Strategy a day, you should be able to read and study the Strategies during the same 30-day time period that you are actually applying the program.

If, upon flipping through the System, it looks like it will be time-consuming, you’re not imagining things – this certainly isn’t an overnight solution. Moreover, I’m not expecting everyone to follow every Strategy or try everything that’s included in this book. However, I am assuming that you are reading this right now because you’re serious about improving your health and fitness. I have no interest in publishing a “fluff” book that really doesn’t offer much in the way of helpful information for an intelligent person. Besides, once you’re rolling, the actual program doesn’t take very much time. Going through the Strategies and assignments at the outset is the part that’s going to be a little more time-intensive. However, the time you spend up-front is what will enable you to set up your program to run as smoothly and efficiently as possible. In the end, you will come out ahead if you take the time to focus on this project for a little while. You can think of it as a crash course in making these important changes in your life – it will be intense for a little while, but it will be over soon and then you’ll have your program up and running as smooth as can be. If you follow the instructions as laid out in this System, your actual workout routine will never have to take more than a few hours per week. Remember, everything new can be overwhelming at first, but it won’t feel that way for long.

If you already follow a fairly healthy lifestyle and are just looking to learn more, pick and choose the Strategies you’d like to follow and keep the “7 Keys” and Reference sections in mind for times when you’d like a refresher in the fundamental topics of health and fitness. Also, keep your eyes peeled for my upcoming titles that will delve more extensively into advanced health and fitness topics.

I know that some of you are reading this as one of my Home Bodies, Hard Nock’s Gym, or Seacoast Family YMCA clients. You will surely recognize some of the ideas presented in this System. Hopefully, you will enjoy this book as a health and fitness resource and it will help supplement your appointments
with me. I thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for your trust, friendship, continuing support of my business, and referrals. I wish the absolute best for you and your loved ones.

I’d like to give special thanks to new clients in 2004 who also happen to be really great people: Susan Anderson, Nancy Angell, Greg Beadle, Courtney Bernier, Dawn Blanchard, Jeff Brown, Judy Chretian, Dee Cote, Dawn Cundy, Barbara Devincenzo, Ingrid Dicenzo, Fenn Duncan, Chris Ferreira, Ellen Hazo, Kathi Jaibur, Jean Lambert, Tiffany Landsperger, Bill McDill, Loretta Meleedy, Jim Miller, Loretta Moseley, Brian Moses, Janet Moses, Lynn Noyes, Kelly Page, Jeffrey Paolino, Diane Pendergast, Tom Pendergast, Sabina Petersen, Susan Reaney, Christine Rivers, Ann Salmon, Heather Siegel, Soni Soulagnet, Magdalena Suarez-Shannon, Francine Vozzella, Donna Winner, and Jim Winner. I’d also like to give special thanks to Dave Nock, owner of Hard Nock’s Gym in Amesbury, MA.
II: The Fundamentals of Metabolism

Understanding metabolism is critical if you’re going to take control of your health, your weight, your fitness, and your energy level. What is metabolism anyway? Even though “metabolism” is a buzzword today, most people only have a vague idea of what it means, although they do know that theirs seems to have slowed down lately! I’ll give you a quick explanation of what metabolism is, what affects it, and what you can do to increase yours right away.

In simple terms, metabolism is the rate at which your body burns fuel to sustain life and all of the processes that take place in your body. The main factors that affect metabolism are activity level, eating habits, muscle tissue, and genetics.

The relationship between metabolism and activity level is pretty straightforward – the more active you are, the more calories you burn. Daily living and exercise combine to form your activity level.

Eating habits is another factor that can have a big impact on your metabolism. How often you eat and what you eat are equally important because both directly affect your blood sugar and energy levels. Unstable blood sugar causes the metabolism to slow down as a means to conserve energy. That's why skipping breakfast (or any meal for that matter) is the worst thing you can do for your metabolism.

Muscle development has a huge effect on your metabolism, and building and conditioning your muscles represents your biggest opportunity to increase your metabolic rate. The more muscle tissue you have, the higher your metabolism will be. Having sufficient muscle mass is a prerequisite to having a youthful, toned body. Also, when you have a good amount of muscle mass you’ll find it much easier to manage your weight. Muscle burns calories, and the more you have the better! Not only does exercising the muscles burn lots of calories, maintaining more muscle on your body also means you burn more calories all day, every day – even while you’re sleeping! Therefore, embarking on a resistance-training program is a no-brainer for dieters. How many people have you heard say their metabolism has changed as they've aged? The main reason these people start to put on weight more easily is that they've experienced a loss of muscle mass over the years. You lose muscle and body tone due to a lack of physical exercise and unstable blood sugar – contrary to the common misconception that muscle loss is simply a natural part of aging. More accurately, muscle loss is just a “natural part” of not exercising your muscles on a consistent basis.

There is also a genetic component to metabolism. Some people have faster metabolisms than average, while others tend to have slower ones. Still, no matter where you fall within the genetic variation, you can always increase your metabolism if you use the right approach.

Now that you have a general overview of metabolism and what affects it, I’m going to reveal the two most powerful things you can do to increase your metabolism:

1. Develop and condition your muscle tissue (usually, although not necessarily, by increasing the size of your muscles) with progressive resistance training.

2. Stabilize your blood sugar level and energy balance throughout the day. Due to hormonal implications in the body, keeping your energy intake steady during the day promotes fat loss and helps prevent additional fat storage. This can be accomplished by eating small meals every few hours, each containing a moderate amount of carbohydrate, protein, and fat.

Taking control of your metabolism is actually pretty easy if you know what to do, and you don't need to exercise more than a few days per week to do it. Besides the two techniques I’ve already introduced for increasing metabolism, I’m going to discuss five more that will help in your quest to raise your metabolism for life. Altogether, these tips make up the “7 Keys” to raising metabolism, which I will detail later in this section of the book.

Before we go any further, though, I would like to differentiate between a few terms I will be using throughout this book. The word “diet” technically refers to a person’s typical way of eating (it doesn’t necessarily refer to a weight-loss plan). So, someone who habitually overeats has a “high-calorie diet,” while someone who eats less in order to lose weight has a “low-calorie diet.” Throughout this book, I will use the term “diet” in this technical or dictionary-definition sense, which is to describe various ways of eating, whether or not that way of eating is likely to result in a change in weight.

However, in this book I’m going to take the liberty to use the term “dieting” to mean what the general public perceives it to mean – the process of eating in a certain way to promote weight loss. A “dieter,” then, will be a person who is trying to eat in a certain way to promote weight loss.
If you’re looking to shed pounds, a common approach is to start by restricting your calories, meaning to restrict your energy intake from food. In other words, you’ll be dieting by reducing or even eliminating consumption of certain types of food (such as following a low-carb or low-fat plan), or by cutting back on the amount of food you eat by watching portion sizes and/or watching what you eat between meals.

Everyone requires a certain number of calories per day to maintain bodyweight. By dieting, the goal is to consume fewer calories than you burn each day, otherwise known as “running a calorie deficit.” The total number of calories you burn per day is your maintenance calorie level. By definition, if you eat at your maintenance calorie level your weight won’t change. Your maintenance calorie level depends on your metabolism, which in turn depends on the four factors I discussed above: activity level, eating habits, muscle tissue, and genetics. Sometimes your maintenance calorie level will be a range rather than an exact number. If you have a range for your maintenance calorie level, you have to eat outside of that range in order to affect a change in your weight. For example, you might maintain your weight on anything from 2000-2400 calories per day, meaning that you’d have to eat less than 2000 on a regular basis to lose weight, or more than 2400 on a regular basis to gain weight.

If you reduce your calorie intake to below maintenance, and therefore are running a calorie deficit, by definition you will lose weight. And, if you continue to run a calorie deficit by consuming less than you burn day after day, you will continue to lose weight. As many of us know, this is easier said than done. More often than not, when you try to diet by cutting calories it doesn’t last very long because you get sick of feeling moody, hungry, and tired. Sometimes, the problem is simply a matter of feeling deprived – you don’t like missing out on all the things you used to eat.

Enduring physical and psychological discomfort is not the only hard part of dieting, however. The other problem with plain-old calorie restriction is that, as you lose weight, you will need to eat fewer and fewer calories as time goes on if you want to continue to lose. There are two reasons for this. The first is that a smaller body requires fewer calories. The second is that your metabolism will begin to slow in response to a reduced calorie intake. When less energy is available, your body perceives the calorie shortage as a threat to survival and will begin to take drastic measures to conserve energy. These changes include a lowered body temperature, reduced heart rate, general lethargy, increase in bodyfat, decrease in lean tissue, and a change in hormonal levels that results in the functioning of some of the body systems slowing down – most notably the “nonessential” systems.

One such system is the one responsible for protein synthesis in the muscles. This body system, known as the “metabolic system,” is responsible for building and maintaining muscle mass. Remember how I said that muscle burns calories? That is exactly what your body doesn’t need when it feels threatened by a low calorie intake. Your body can “kill two birds with one stone” by breaking down muscle tissue when it wants to conserve energy. When muscle tissue is broken down into amino acids and burned for fuel, it provides a source of calories for the body, and at the same time your body eliminates the need to feed that muscle extra calories in the future. Of course, that’s bad news for the dieter who wants to burn all the extra calories he can.

The immune system is another “nonessential” system that starts to slow down in response to a low calorie intake. Your body won’t allocate as much energy toward fighting off illness when it’s trying to fight for survival from a perceived threat of starvation. When the body feels that it’s at risk for starving to death, everything becomes secondary to the need to obtain more food.

The reproductive system is the third “nonessential” system that starts shutting down when you’re not eating many calories. Libido drops, again, because the body’s main concern is to prevent itself from starving to death. Reproduction, which of course is related to libido, takes a secondary role when there’s a perceived threat of starvation (this is one reason why women may stop menstruating and men sometimes become impotent if they cut calories too hard or lose most of their bodyfat). The loss of libido makes sense on another level too – if survival is already being threatened, the last thing you need is to reproduce, because that means you’ll have even more people around to compete for the scarce resources!

Your body wants one thing when it’s deprived of calories, and that’s to find food and eat it, fast! This explains why many dieters become obsessed with food – and sometimes that doesn’t ever go away, even when a dieter goes off his diet and begins to eat more calories, and even when his bodyfat stores are plentiful.

With all the negative implications of low-calorie diets, it seems that there has to be a better solution for weight loss! Luckily, there is. You have another option to lose weight besides cutting calories, because the other side of your energy (or calorie) balance – the number of calories you burn per day – isn’t set in
If you start burning more calories than you used to, you will be able to keep eating the same amount of food, or in some cases even more food than you had been eating, and lose weight at the same time. Losing weight while eating a “normal” amount of food is an easier and healthier way to diet, both from a physical and a psychological standpoint. You can increase the number of calories you burn per day by following the “7 Keys to Raising Your Metabolism for Life” which I will describe shortly.

One rule of thumb to keep in mind is that calorie burn increases when daily activity goes up. One way to increase daily activity is through exercise. Many people who want to lose weight will perform moderate-pace cardiovascular exercise (such as brisk walking or easy jogging) because they know that it burns calories. “Burning” calories is really just another way of saying that you’ve raised your maintenance calorie level. When you raise your maintenance calorie level but don’t eat any more to compensate, you’ll lose weight.

For example, if you have been eating about 2000 calories per day while maintaining your weight and would like to lose weight, you have a couple of choices. One option is to start eating fewer calories. If you choose this option, you might cut out 500 calories and eat just 1500 per day.

**Creating an energy deficit**

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Another option for weight loss is to continue eating the same amount but increase your activity level during the day, whether you do that at work, at play, through exercise, or all of the above. When you become more active, your daily calorie needs go up. Using the current example, taking the extra activity into account your maintenance calorie level is now higher than 2000 per day – it might go up to 2500 when you begin adding more activity into your day. This means, if you continue to eat just 2000 calories, you will lose weight.

**Creating an energy deficit**

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You might be wondering why you couldn’t eat less and move more in order to lose weight even faster. This will work to a point, but you need to understand that your best bet for fat loss is to maintain the optimal calorie deficit – not too small, but not too large either. This concept is known as “energy balance” and you can read about it on the next page.
Energy Balance

How large should your calorie deficit be? In other words, by how much should you be looking to “undereat” or “overburn” to lose the greatest amount of fat and the least amount of muscle, and at the same time remain healthy and energetic? These questions refer to the concept of energy balance. Calories are the way in which we measure the energy provided by food. Energy balance in the context of human metabolism refers to calories-in versus calories-out.

A 150-pound woman will burn roughly 1500 calories just to maintain her body weight before typical daily activity is taken into account. “Typical daily activity” refers to any movement beyond simply resting in bed. The 1500 calories is her basal metabolic rate (BMR). If the woman works full-time, walks her dog, and does a few errands during the day, she has a moderate level of daily activity, and probably burns another 500 calories on top of her BMR. This makes her daily calorie burn before exercise 2000 calories. If she also performs cardiovascular exercise at a moderate-pace for 30 minutes, she might burn another 200 calories, and if she completes a 30-minute resistance training program she might burn an additional 200 calories. After everything has been taken into consideration, during a day like this she burns around 2400 calories.

The human body is capable of burning about 0.5-2.0 pounds of bodyfat per week as an energy source (to supply calories to cover the calorie deficit). The exact ceiling for what’s possible in terms of bodyfat loss depends on a person’s size, activity level, and individual metabolism. In other words, larger people and more active people generally are able to lose fat faster than smaller people and less active people. However, each person has her own metabolic rate, which means there is individual variation in how fast a person can lose bodyfat. Generally, if you weigh less than 170 pounds you won’t be able to lose in the upper range of 1.5-2.0 pounds of bodyfat per week, at least not on a regular basis. The reason is that the amount of bodyfat you can lose in a day is actually based on percentage of total body weight. This makes sense if you think about it, because a 5-pound weight loss on a 120-pound frame is comparable to a 10-pound weight loss on a 240-pound frame.

You need to burn about 3500 calories without replacing them with calories from food in order to burn off one pound of bodyfat. Each pound of fat you burn supplies 3500 calories to the body to cover your calorie deficit. If you’d like to shoot for the respectable goal of losing one pound of bodyfat in a week, you’ll need to burn an average of 500 calories per day beyond the number you consume, and you’ll need to do that for seven days (500 calories x 7 days = 3500 calories, or one pound of fat).

You may be wondering why you can sometimes lose a pound (or three) in a day when you weigh yourself on the scale. This type of fluctuation in bodyweight is due to a change in water weight, and water weight can come on and off quickly. All you have to do is drink a 16-ounce bottle of water! A person’s weight on the scale can vary within a 10-pound range in some cases, even when there is no change in the amount of muscle or bodyfat he’s carrying. The difference in weight on the scale is due to the amount of water and carbohydrate being stored in the body. Each gram of carbohydrate stored in the body holds about 3 grams of water along with it, which can add up fast because your muscles have the ability to store 500-1300 grams of carbs or more, depending on the amount of lean body mass you carry and the conditioning of your muscles (weight-training increases your body’s ability to store carbs in the muscles). According to the scale, you might lose five pounds or more the first week of a diet because there is a loss of water weight associated with running the calorie deficit that is necessary for fat loss (Unless you have been eating almost nothing and exercising for hours and hours every day, you surely haven’t created a calorie deficit to the tune of 17,500 calories in just seven days! That’s what it would take to lose five pounds of actual bodyfat). After that initial reduction in water weight, however, each pound lost on the scale when you monitor your weight on a weekly basis should represent an actual loss of bodyfat. Of
course, this is assuming you’re not dieting too hard and you’re doing your resistance training. If you are dieting too hard or you’re not doing resistance training, your weight loss most likely will be from a combination of muscle loss and fat loss.

Many of the weight-loss products out there today are designed to reduce water weight, which is only a temporary change. However, this change on the scale happens quickly and is a relatively painless occurrence for the dieter, which equates to the perfect short-term solution for the average person who wants results now! Of course, in the long run nothing has happened at all. But people still buy into this stuff to the tune of $45-billion a year. By the same token, you can overeat for a day and see the scale climb 5 pounds or more, but that represents just a temporary gain in water weight. True fat gain and fat loss is a much slower process, and to gain a pound of bodyfat you’d have to eat 3500 calories beyond your maintenance level (putting you up above 5500 calories consumed in a single day). Can it be done? Sure. Will most people be able to overeat by that much, even if they tried? No.

Let’s go back to our example of the 150-pound woman with a theoretical maintenance calorie level before exercise of 2000 calories per day. She has several choices if she wants to run a calorie deficit in order to lose bodyfat. If she didn’t do any cardio on one particular day but completed a resistance training routine (or vice-versa, since we estimated that each would burn 200 calories), she would burn 2200 calories that day. This means she needs to eat 1700 to run a deficit of 500 calories for the day and be on track to lose one pound of bodyfat per week. When you run a calorie deficit, there is a discrepancy between the number of calories you consume and the number of calories you burn. The calories you burn above and beyond your food intake to create your calorie deficit have to come from somewhere (no, it’s not like the national budget deficit!), and it turns out that, as long as you exercise, they usually come from your bodyfat as it’s burned for energy.

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If the woman does both cardio and resistance training, she burns 2400 calories (2000 before exercise, 200 for cardio and 200 for resistance training), and therefore needs to eat 1900 calories in order to create a 500-calorie deficit.

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What happens if she does resistance training plus 60 minutes of cardio and only eats 1000 calories? If she does 60 minutes of cardio rather than the 30 minutes we’ve been using as an example, her total daily calorie burn is 2600, up from 2400 (assuming that each 30 minutes of cardio burns 200 calories). If she eats only 1000 calories that day, she will be running a 1600-calorie deficit. Unfortunately, not all of the calories making up that deficit will come from bodyfat being burned for energy. In fact, if she creates a 1600-calorie deficit for more than a day or two, most of the necessary calories will be provided by lean tissue being burned for energy, which will cause her metabolism to slow down. Having a slower metabolism means that she burns fewer calories tomorrow, even if she maintains the same activity level (If she lowers her calories drastically just for a day or two, she won’t be at risk for slowing her metabolism – but all that will happen is she’ll start using up her stored muscle glycogen as an energy source. Still, she won’t be burning much, if any, more bodyfat than she would have burned just by sticking to the recommended 500-calorie deficit).
If she depletes her muscle glycogen by eating a very-low-calorie diet and exercising vigorously a few days in a row, she will lose several pounds of water weight and perhaps 1750 calories’ worth, or a half-pound, of bodyfat (which is about the same amount she would have lost just sticking to the 500-calorie deficit). However, the depletion of muscle glycogen will leave her weak and tired, and her exercise performance and motivation will take a nosedive. The crash dieting also sets her up to break her diet big-time when the hunger and appetite increase due to the crash diet starts to kick in.

The situation I’ve described here is known as yo-yo dieting, and it’s not pretty. Most people will end up breaking such a severe diet because the hunger and cravings they are almost sure to experience prove to be too difficult to endure. Let’s assume, though, that this person maintains her crash diet for an entire week. Here’s what her energy balance looks like on a daily basis:

| 500-calories’ worth of fat loss, 1100-calories’ worth of muscle loss and glycogen/water loss = a 1600-calorie deficit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eat | x | 500 | 1000 | 1500 | 2000 | 2500 | Burn | x |
| calories/day | | | | | | |

In general, the human body is not physiologically capable of losing nearly a half-pound of fat in a single day. That means the person who runs a 1600-calorie deficit every day will lose some fat but more lean tissue, and her body will in turn adjust its metabolism downward in order to conserve energy. This happens due to the body’s survival mechanisms. Of course, a large calorie deficit for just one day won’t result in a drastic change in metabolism, but if you string a few days together with a large calorie deficit, your metabolism will surely take a turn for the worse. And, it takes much longer for your metabolism to be brought back up to normal than it does for your metabolism to crash. The human body is designed to vigorously defend against fat loss, but the body accepts weight gain much more easily.

See, your body’s primary concern is survival – even though you’re dieting with the purpose of shedding excess bodyfat, your body’s tendency is to fight fat loss tooth and nail, especially when it’s not receiving a steady supply of calories. Your body’s first step when faced with an energy crisis (a too-large calorie deficit) is to conserve fat stores, since they are the only thing that will keep you alive when food isn’t readily available. When you restrict your food intake, your body has no way of knowing that you’re not in the midst of a genuine famine. In fact, the newest diet pills and supplements in the works focus on tricking your body into thinking everything’s okay and that plenty of calories are coming in. If these pills and supplements prove to be effective and become available, you will be able to diet without experiencing the metabolic slowdown that leads to a stall in your weight loss. It’s important you understand that, during “famine” conditions, bodyfat is the most precious resource there is and it’s the last thing your body is willing to let go. That’s why it’s important for you to eat on a regular basis while you’re dieting, and also to avoid cutting calories too drastically. If you restrict calories too much, your body will simply fight back that much harder by conserving more energy. Heavy restriction of calories might work in the short-term to drop a few pounds, but it won’t work in the long-term unless you’re planning on starving yourself for the rest of your life – which isn’t very realistic and definitely isn’t healthy.

Due to the survival response, you’ll find that the harder you cut calories, the more your body will intensify your hunger and appetite. Your body’s first method of defense when there isn’t enough food coming in is to slow the metabolism to conserve energy. Its primary methods of attack are to increase the secretion of stress hormones and intensify your hunger and appetite. The presence of stress hormones shuts down the nonessential systems in the body (a defense against a low calorie intake) and also stimulates you to stay alert in order to find food (an “attack” to rectify the low food supply), while the increased hunger and appetite further motivate you in your pursuit for nourishment (to energize your “attack” to find food). You become much more likely to crave calorie-dense foods (those high in fat and/or sugar) when you’re not eating much, since those foods will provide the most calories to your body the quickest.

The survival mechanism is designed to motivate you to go find food and eat it as quickly as possible, because your body assumes that there is simply none around. The intense sensation of hunger you’ll experience when you run a large calorie deficit makes it extremely difficult to continue to eat so little. In fact, the hunger you’ll experience when you run a large calorie deficit makes it difficult to continue to maintain any calorie deficit at all, and it drives some dieters to break their diet on a binge. You have to
realize that willpower has nothing to do with this. If you’re like the majority of people, your body releases hormones that literally leave you powerless over what you will or will not eat. When you cut calories too hard or go for too long without eating, your body will fight you tooth and nail. When people don’t understand this and they get upset with themselves for being “weak,” their morale suffers and their confidence takes a hit. Once this has happened they start lacking the confidence that’s necessary to succeed in weight loss. They start feeling like they deserve to look the way they do because they don’t have any “willpower” when it comes to food. This notion becomes a downward spiral of negative thinking that quite often leads to self-sabotage. It literally traps people into a lifetime of health problems, low self-esteem, and unhappiness if no one shows them the way.

To make matters worse, when you cut calories too hard your body not only ramps up hunger to replace the calorie deficit you created while dieting, but it actually increases hunger above and beyond the magnitude of your deficit. The purpose? To encourage you to overeat in case there’s another “famine” in the future. That way you’ll have extra bodyfat in storage in case you’re ever deprived of food again. Your body also primes itself to become ultra-efficient at gaining weight after a period of food restriction, again as part of the survival response. You can witness this phenomenon in action when you watch “yo-yo dieters” gain and lose weight over and over, more often than not gaining back more than they had lost with each episode. Even if yo-yo dieters manage to stay the same weight over time, after each episode of losing weight rapidly only to gain it back again they will be left with more bodyfat and less muscle. As you know, this combination is deadly for the metabolism. Bodyfat doesn’t burn a significant number of extra calories, which means that overweight people don’t necessarily burn more calories than thin people. It’s the difference in lean mass that affects the number of calories burned per day, and you can’t tell who has more lean mass simply by comparing what two people weigh on the scale. For instance, a lean person weighing 160 pounds at 10% bodyfat has 16 pounds of fat and 144 pounds of lean weight on his body, while an overweight person weighing 200 pounds at 30% bodyfat has 60 pounds of fat and just 140 pounds of lean weight on his body. The 160-pound person actually has 4 more pounds of lean weight on his body even though he’s 40 pounds lighter – and, all other things being equal, has a higher metabolism as result.

It should be apparent to you by now that going on a severe diet is an exercise in futility. Even if, by some Herculean willpower, you manage to continue eating less and less over time to keep the weight off, you will eventually reach a point where your metabolism is so slow that you’ll gain weight and bodyfat even on tiny amounts of food. That is the “reward” you’ll get for all your efforts! However, there is a way around this problem: If you can be patient and are willing to settle for “only” 0.5-2.0 pounds of fat loss a week, you should be able to continue to lose excess bodyfat at that rate for months on end. With dieting, it really is true that “slow and steady wins the race.”

See, the body is capable of burning bodyfat to provide fuel for all your daily activities, including exercise. There is a “ceiling” on how much bodyfat you can burn per day for energy, but the number of days your body will allow you to hit that ceiling is virtually unlimited. What is that ceiling? Well, if you undereat by approximately 500 calories per day (meaning that you’re running a 500-calorie deficit), nearly all of that deficit will be filled by calories from bodyfat as it’s being burned for energy. In this case, you’ll still have plenty of energy for your workouts and your life in general because, besides the energy you’ll get from your food intake, you’ll be deriving energy from your bodyfat as it’s being burned off. Your metabolism shouldn’t be affected, because your body won’t be too alarmed by a 500-calorie deficit. Of course, if you’re a really small or a really lean person, your ideal calorie deficit for fat loss will be a little lower. On the other hand, if you’re a larger person your deficit can be higher. But shooting for a 500-calorie deficit per day is a great strategy for fat-loss for most people. Those at the extreme ends in weight and bodyfat will want to go a little higher or a little lower than 500 calories for their deficit.

If you try for a larger deficit in order to hasten fat loss, the first thing you have to realize is that your body will slow your metabolism to try to save calories, which means in the future you’ll have to reduce your calories even further to keep hitting the same deficit. For example, if you burn 2000 calories and eat only 1500 to create a 500-calorie deficit, you should be able to continue that pattern for quite some time and expect the same results – a one-pound fat loss per week. Your metabolism shouldn’t slow much, if at all, when you stick to a 500-calorie deficit. However, if you burn 2000 calories and eat 1000 to create a 1000-calorie deficit, after a few weeks you’ll probably need to eat just 700 to continue to create a 1000-calorie deficit. Why? Because eating so little will probably slow your metabolism to the point that you only burn 1700 per day, rather than the 2000 you burned per day before you caused your metabolism to slow down.

In this instance, one reason your metabolism will slow down is because your body will start burning
it’s own muscle tissue for an additional source of energy when your calorie deficit is too large. That means you won’t burn as much bodyfat as you’d think you would looking at the size of your calorie deficit, because some of that energy deficit will be filled by the burning of lean tissue. Another reason your metabolism slows is that your body will begin to shut down the functioning of its nonessential systems when there are not enough calories available. Still another reason is the fact that your energy level will drop like a rock when you’re not eating enough, which means you’ll feel tired and lethargic and will burn fewer calories during activity.

So, getting back to the fat-burning “ceiling” question, the true “ceiling” to how much fat you can lose per day is greater than 500 calories’ worth, but beyond that point you won’t see 100% efficiency in bodyfat covering the calorie deficit. In other words, when you cut calories more than that you start losing part lean tissue and part bodyfat, but even more importantly, your metabolism will begin to slow, making fat loss that much harder in the future.

The solution to this dilemma is to face the physiological reality of the way the body responds, and that means you need to keep your calorie deficit within a certain limit on a daily basis. You’ve got to relinquish the fantasy that you can lose a pound of fat or more per day. It’s just not going to happen – that’s the honest truth.

Your next question might be, “Do I need to count calories to make sure I hit the right calorie deficit?” You’ll be relieved to know that you don’t need to literally count every calorie to make this concept of shooting for the appropriate calorie deficit work for you. If you are eating 3-6 relatively small but healthy meals (including a few treats here and there) and losing 0.5-3.0 pounds a week according to the scale (which will reflect a combination of fat loss and water loss from your diet), you will know that you’re on track with the amount of food you’re eating. Keep in mind, if you’re a beginner you might not lose anything on the scale at first, even if you’re losing bodyfat. It’s common for beginners to build muscle and increase their capacity to store muscle glycogen during their first months of training. Beginners typically gain this lean weight during the first few months while losing bodyfat at the same time, which is why they might not show a gain or a loss in weight on the scale for the first month or two (in spite of the fact that they almost always lose bodyfat). Having your bodyfat percentage tested once a month and paying attention to how your clothes fit and how you look in the mirror should clue you in as to whether you’re losing fat and on track.

As long as you’re at least ten pounds above your ideal weight, another way to estimate your calorie deficit is to monitor hunger. If you’re hitting the appropriate calorie deficit, you shouldn’t be hungry between meals or snacks (assuming the majority of your diet consists of healthful foods), although you might start getting hungry an hour or so before it’s time to eat again. If you’re hitting the appropriate calorie deficit, you also should expect to wake up a bit hungry in the morning and find yourself looking forward to breakfast. In general, if you’re hungry all the time your calorie deficit is probably too severe. However, if you’re already lean (and got that way by dieting, not because you’re naturally lean) and are looking to get even leaner, you should expect to be hungry pretty much all the time – it just goes with the territory of trying to get below your body’s “set point,” which is the weight and/or bodyfat percentage at which your body was designed to settle.

In spite of understanding this, you might be wondering about your friend who is thin as a rail and eats as much as he wants. You need to realize that there will always be those lucky few who are naturally very lean, and they usually won’t feel hungry at all, even when they are nearly as lean as can be (these are the people who wouldn’t survive if a true famine were to strike, because genetically they aren’t programmed to carry much bodyfat and it’s hard for them to sustain a calorie surplus – when they overeat their metabolic rate tends to rise automatically, which burns off the extra calories). And yes, you have permission to hate them for it!

Now that we’ve covered the “calorie deficit” aspect of fat loss, I’ll explain another diet issue you’ll need to address. The ideal energy balance as it relates to fat loss isn’t only about the numbers at the end of the day (calories-in versus calories-out.) Energy balance throughout different points in the day is just as important as energy balance at the end of the day if you are looking to lose fat rather than muscle and keep your metabolism up. Even if you don’t care about how much muscle you have per se, if you lose too much muscle you will pay the price of a lowered metabolism and will find yourself gaining weight even on tiny amounts of food. Besides, you’ll never achieve a youthful, toned look if you don’t have sufficient muscle mass.

The best thing to do in order to keep your energy balance in check throughout the day is to eat every three or four hours. Also, you should limit your workouts, particularly if they’re intense ones, to one hour.
You might find it helpful to think of your calorie energy balance as a bank account. In this context, you can think of eating as “depositing” energy into your account. Daily living and exercise both “withdraw” energy, although daily living “withdraws” a small but steady amount, whereas exercise “withdraws” a big chunk at once. If you try to “withdraw” too much energy at once with a super-long exercise session, particularly if you haven’t eaten recently, you might “bounce an energy check.” Your body doesn’t just quit on you by declaring “zero energy,” since technically you’d be dead if nothing functioned at all. Instead, your survival mechanism kicks in as your energy reserves start running low. This causes a shift in hormones, which will downgrade your metabolism as you approach the point where you’ve run out of available energy. This downgrade in metabolism is a precaution your body takes so that you don’t run your energy account completely dry. By conserving energy to a greater and greater extent the closer you get to running out, you will maintain just enough energy for quite a while so that, if it were a true famine, you’d be able to continue the search for food (again, which explains why many people can’t keep their mind off food when they’re dieting).

This downgrade in metabolism means you won’t see the same weight loss benefit from a workout if you haven’t been eating properly, because your body won’t allow you to burn the usual amount of energy to be burned during the workout. Also, if you haven’t been eating properly your body will take steps to protect the most precious source of energy it has – your bodyfat. Of course, you can’t perform any activity using no fuel at all, which means you’ll surely begin to burn muscle if you burn too many calories at once or if you exercise when you haven’t eaten enough in the past 24 hours. And, as you know, losing muscle always makes fat loss harder in the end.

If you could burn bodyfat quickly and in an unlimited amount, you could tap your excess bodyfat for fuel when you “bounce an energy check.” However, that simply isn’t possible from a physiological standpoint. There is a limit to the amount of bodyfat that your body can burn for energy in a given day. The reason for this limit goes back to the fact that your body reacts by trying to conserve energy when there aren’t many calories coming in. By shifting the metabolism from primarily burning fat for fuel to primarily burning muscle, your body is acting smart in an energy crisis. Muscle burns extra calories every day, whereas fat does not. So, of course your body would rather burn muscle when it perceives an energy crisis, because less muscle means a lower metabolism, which means your body won’t need as many calories in the future to maintain itself. When your calorie intake is low, burning muscle is the obvious choice to your body – the last thing your body wants to do is relinquish those precious fat stores that don’t cost any energy to maintain and that it thinks is the only thing keeping you from starving to death.

How is all this information put to practical use? For one thing, it’s not a good idea to exercise if you haven’t eaten in the past three or four hours. However, if it makes you uncomfortable to eat before workouts, you should be okay exercising on an empty stomach as long as you eat well right after your workout and you keep your session to an hour or less. The reason you don’t have to eat before your workout is that you should have glycogen stored in your muscles from previous meals. Glycogen stores won’t take you as far as you could go if you also had a meal before exercising, but they should fuel you through 60-90 minutes of heavy training, assuming that you haven’t been following a very-low-carb diet. However, if you haven’t been eating many carbs you won’t have much glycogen in storage, and you will be at risk for losing muscle if you exercise vigorously. On the other hand, easy cardio shouldn’t be a problem in this situation because that type of exercise doesn’t burn many calories, and the ones it does burn can come from bodyfat.

If you don’t have any food calories or glycogen available for use and you complete a resistance-training session or an intense cardio workout, your body will be forced to burn your own muscle tissue for fuel. This is because bodyfat cannot be broken down into the glucose that is required to fuel those types of exercise, so in those instances your body has no choice but to break down muscle. During cardio, your body uses glucose (which can come from a recent meal, stored glycogen, or muscle tissue), fats circulating in your bloodstream from your last meal, and stored bodyfat for fuel. Resistance training is different, as it relies solely on carbs – that is, glucose and glycogen – for fuel.

You want to avoid the situation where you body is forced to break down muscle tissue for glucose. If you plan to exercise for over an hour at a time, you should have a solid meal during the 3-4 hours before your session, or else sip a sports drink or protein shake before or during your workout, especially if you’re doing resistance training. You can get away with doing easy to moderate cardio with no food in your stomach, but you might find that you perform better if you’ve had something to eat.

I know that it sounds enticing to try and force your body to rely on bodyfat by not having any food calories in your system before exercise, but you have to understand that you’ll lose weight either way, as
long as you’re running a calorie deficit on a daily basis. If you’re running a calorie deficit, you will lose bodyfat even if you don’t burn bodyfat specifically for your fuel during exercise. If this is a bit confusing, hang on – let me explain.

If you’re using the food calories you’ve just eaten to fuel your exercise and you’re also running a calorie deficit, there won’t be any calories left over at the end of the day to be stored as bodyfat. Over the course of the day, all you need to do is expend more calories than you take in and you’ll lose weight. It’s not what you burn for energy (meaning food calories or calories from bodyfat), but rather how much energy you burn, that determines weight loss. Even if, theoretically, you could use bodyfat alone to fuel your exercise, that won’t matter one bit if you proceed to consume more calories than you burn that day. Those extra food calories you’d be taking in will simply replace any of bodyfat you lost during exercise with “new” bodyfat if you overeat habitually. On the other hand, when you run a calorie deficit you will burn at least some bodyfat to cover that energy deficit, even if you don’t do any exercise that day. You’re probably getting sick of hearing this, but it all goes back to what I’ve been saying all along: You need to burn more calories than you consume in order to lose weight. Of course, the reason I say that you should avoid burning your own muscle for fuel is not because you won’t lose weight (you’d still lose weight if you burn muscle, at least in the short-term), but because burning muscle will slow your metabolism, making weight loss in the future nearly impossible. And I refuse to give you a short-term fix that will allow you to lose weight initially, only to gain it all back before you know it.

Another application of seeking optimal energy balance throughout the day lies with the timing of exercise and the amount per session. If you split an hour-long workout into two 30-minute sessions, your energy balance will remain more consistent. By the same token, it’s generally better to train for 30 minutes, six days per week rather than 60 minutes, three days per week. Applying this degree of scrutiny to your exercise schedule is getting very nit-picky for sure, but the reality is that training more frequently but with shorter sessions is optimal both from an energy balance standpoint and a hormonal standpoint. It also tends to be better from an intensity standpoint, because it’s easier to work hard for just 30 minutes at a time.

How much does all of this specific stuff matter? Not very, especially when comparing people who exercise to people who don’t. You get an enormous benefit simply by being one of the few who exercise the correct way, no matter how you split up the time, and when you get really picky with all the little details the improvements in results are miniscule, but you will realize them if you’re willing to put in the extra effort and attention to detail. It’s just that you start to see diminishing returns when you go beyond the point of simply training your entire body with weights plus some cardio three times a week, all other details aside. Most people aren’t able or simply don’t want to cater their lives to ideal exercise patterns all the time, and they still see great results.

The other reason it’s okay to do longer but less frequent sessions is that your muscles (if your diet is in order, and particularly if it’s not too low in carbs) should have energy stored up in the form of muscle glycogen, meaning that you can “save” energy for the time when the “big check” (your workout) is “withdrawn.” If you’re a beginner or an intermediate-level exerciser, please don’t concern yourself with splitting up your sessions. You don’t need to bother with that level of detail yet. Save it for when you really need it if you hit a plateau down the line. Just get your sessions in and you will see the results. I include this information for the advanced exercisers reading, and also because I want to provide you with an overview on how all this fitness stuff works. I also don’t want to withhold any of my “secrets” from you if you’re willing to do everything possible to maximize your fitness success. Part of the key to long-term success, though, lies in not trying to do too much too soon. In other words, you want to KISS (keep it simple stupid) until that stops working, at which point you can try one of the more advanced or sophisticated methods. You always want to leave room to make changes in the future if you happen to plateau with what you’re doing now. That way you should be able to continue making progress for a long time, without having to go through too much trouble before it’s really necessary.

Although you can usually get away with “withdrawing” large amounts of energy all at once during a workout, it doesn’t work that way when it comes to “depositing” energy by eating food. In other words, you can’t consume all your calories for the day in the form of one huge meal and expect to see the same results you’d get if you ate five mini-meals spaced evenly throughout the day. This holds true for everyone, beginners included. You’ll always get much better results from your exercise, especially in terms of changes in your appearance, if you eat properly. The reason that you can’t eat all your calories at once and expect to stay lean has to do with the way the body responds to overfeeding and underfeeding. Your body is designed to store energy, or calories, as bodyfat more efficiently than it burns bodyfat. Your body would much rather store fat than burn it because bodyfat is a safety net for your survival during times when there
Isn’t enough food around. Even though starving to death is probably one of the last things on your mind, all your body has to go by is your recent history of food intake. If you have been eating very little or skipping meals, your body must assume for the sake of its own survival that this state of affairs will probably continue. Your body will decide that it had better adapt and become more efficient at hoarding calories when you do provide them, or else you might die of starvation.

Let’s take a look at the case where you eat one giant meal but have nothing else to eat that day. If you take in your full days’ worth of calories all at once, you will be consuming more than your body can store as glycogen or burn as fuel right away. Some of the extra calories (specifically the calories from carbs) will go into glycogen stores in the muscles, which serve as a short-term storage place for fuel. In fact, if you have been weight training you will be able to store more of the carb calories as glycogen than someone who doesn’t perform any resistance training. Only calories from carbohydrates can be stored as glycogen. The calories from fat and protein will be metabolized to perform various functions in the body. Once that need is met, any additional fat and protein calories will be burned for energy or converted to and stored as bodyfat – you can’t store protein and fat in their original form for use in the immediate future like you can carbs.

Resistance training improves your body’s ability to store carbs, as does choosing complex carbs over their refined counterparts. The ability to store more carbs is a good thing because that means fewer calories will be available to be converted into bodyfat. However, if your glycogen stores are topped off (depending on how in-shape he is, a 150-pound person can store 2000-3500 carb calories in the muscles) carbs too will be converted to and stored as bodyfat. In a nutshell, if you eat too many calories above maintenance, any of the three macronutrients can be stored as bodyfat. It’s just that the carbs go towards replenishing muscle glycogen first before any of them will be converted into bodyfat. You still could eat enough calories from carbs to result in some being stored as bodyfat, but this would require eating thousands of calories above your maintenance level for days on end, which is a very hard thing to do. Most of the time when you’re running a calorie surplus it’s the dietary fat in your food that gets stored, while the carbs in the food go toward replenishing muscle glycogen. All this means that the only situation where you can overeat calories and not see an immediate increase in bodyfat is when you eat lots of low-fat, high-carb foods just for a day or two. This is the basis behind “carb-loading” athletes sometimes do, and also the low-fat diet craze of the 90s. Carb-loading has it’s place if you follow a cyclic diet, but that issue is more appropriate for an advanced book on diet and nutrition. No matter how you slice it, though, if you eat too many calories on a regular basis you will gain bodyfat, and the most deadly combination is high-fat and high-carbs in the same meal (the foods we typically think of as “fattening” like casseroles and rich desserts).

One of the great things about exercise is that it burns glycogen, which prevents your glycogen stores from getting “topped off” (When your glycogen stores are topped off, you will gain bodyfat easily). Exercise also increases the capacity of your glycogen stores. Therefore, by burning glycogen and increasing glycogen storage capacity, exercise gives you a “safety net” that allows you to get away with overeating for a day or two without putting on bodyfat. On the other hand, sedentary individuals have a smaller capacity for glycogen storage that tends to be chronically topped off because they’re not burning many calories during activity. This means almost any time they overeat, even if it’s only by a little, they are apt to gain bodyfat.

If you make it easy by overeating habitually, your body tries to store as many calories as possible as bodyfat, because bodyfat is energy stored in reserve in case you hit another “famine” and go for too long without food. It’s a pretty efficient energy reserve at that – each pound of bodyfat can provide about 3500 calories’ worth of energy when it’s burned. If you are a person who typically eats just two high-calorie meals per day, you might have an overall energy balance that looks okay (meaning that most days you land somewhere between maintenance and a 500-calorie deficit), but still have a high level of bodyfat. Although this might seem impossible at first glance, it happens because the more food you eat at once, the more likely it is to be stored as bodyfat and the less likely it is to be burned off or used to build or maintain muscle tissue and the other “nonessential” systems, including the immune system and the reproductive system. That’s why people who don’t eat properly tend to get sick more often and are more likely to experience reproductive problems. Even though a person who eats two large meals a day may be overweight, underweight, or at an ideal weight, if he’s not spreading his food intake throughout the day his body will start to show signs of malnutrition. The body can’t properly handle an overload of calories coming in at once. At the same time, it will suffer from not having enough food at other points during the day. Eating large meals that are spread too far apart is indeed a type of malnutrition because the proper nutrition isn’t being provided at all times during the day.
Looking at this situation in the context of the bank accounts, if you skip breakfast, eat a light lunch, and then have a huge dinner, you end up trying to “withdraw” energy from an empty account all day (“bouncing checks” left and right), and you finally put all the “money” into the account at night when it’s too late. Even though you can “save” some of that extra energy you’re consuming as muscle glycogen to be used in the near future, some of it inevitably gets stored as bodyfat. Also, during the day when you’re not eating enough to cover your energy “costs,” your body slows down its rate of energy expenditure to accommodate the lack of available fuel. This results in a lower daily calorie burn. Your body might break down muscle tissue during this energy shortage, for a couple of reasons. Burning muscle provides a calorie source, for one thing. Also, muscle is “expensive” for your body to maintain calorie-wise. Your body knows that, in order to maintain the muscle, a good number of calories will be required on a daily basis. Your body isn’t very confident that you will provide those calories if you’ve been going for long periods of time (due to blood sugar patterns after eating, “long periods of time” is about five hours) without food. If you go for too long between meals on a regular basis, your body won’t be able to maintain much muscle, and less muscle means a lower daily calorie burn.

For all these reason and more, you aren’t likely to lose bodyfat and you might even gain some if you eat just one or two big meals per day. You can’t try to “save up” calories on a regular basis so that you can have a big meal and/or partake in drinking or eating sweets or fried food and expect to get or stay lean.

The bottom line is that you can enjoy a larger quantity of food and a reduced bodyweight if you eat small meals and snacks frequently throughout the day. Besides the fact that eating more food is satisfying and makes sticking to your diet plan easier, eating more is a good thing because a varied, nutritious diet will leave you healthier, happier, and more energetic, with more muscle and less fat on your body.

You should strive to keep your energy balance steady all day, meaning to keep a steady input versus output of calories. If you’re trying to gain weight, just tweak your diet to have a slightly higher input of calories (about 250 extra calories per day, to the tune of 0.5 pound gained per week). If you’re trying to lose weight, shift your diet to have a slightly higher output of calories (a deficit of 500 calories per day). If you want to maintain your weight, try to keep your calorie input and output the same.

An advanced exerciser who wants to gain muscle and lose fat while staying approximately the same weight over time might use some form of cyclic dieting. Assuming the person’s goal is weight maintenance while gaining muscle and losing fat (commonly referred to as “toning”), during a cyclic diet energy intake versus output won’t be equal on daily basis, but it will be equal over the period of a week, month, or year, depending on the length of the cycle. For instance, this type of plan might have you diet at a calorie deficit for four weeks followed by four weeks with a calorie surplus.

You can also use a cyclic diet plan for weight loss. A cyclic plan works great for those who want to maintain their muscle mass as they lose weight and bodyfat. An example of this type of plan is six weeks at a calorie deficit, followed by two weeks at maintenance or a calorie surplus in order to re-set metabolism and rebuild any muscle that was lost while dieting. Although cyclic diets are always an option, for a beginner or for someone getting back into an exercise routine, muscle gain and/or fat loss should be fairly easy to accomplish without having to do anything other than be in a calorie surplus or run a calorie deficit on a daily basis.

Even if you’re an intermediate or advanced exerciser, if you just want to maintain your shape or see gradual improvement over time, all you really need to do is eat when you’re hungry and stop when you’re full. Just be sure to choose nutritious foods the majority of the time (See Reference B in the back of the book for nutrition guidelines for exercisers).

No matter what your particular goals, everyone needs a steady supply of calories and protein to keep his metabolism humming and to rebuild muscle tissue after it gets broken down during weight training. If your diet doesn’t contain enough of the nutrient “building blocks” your muscles need, you simply won’t see the same results from your resistance training, no matter how hard you work out. After all, you can’t build muscle from nothing (“nothing” meaning not enough protein and total calories in the diet to meet energy demands with enough left over for muscle building). And, if you fail to eat enough carbohydrates, your liver and muscle glycogen will remain chronically depleted. When you fail to replenish glycogen to at least moderate levels, you’ll get mediocre results from your exercise program because you won’t recover as fast or as thoroughly. Also, if you’re running low on carbs you will tend to feel drained of energy and strength during your workouts. This means you won’t burn as many calories during your exercise sessions and you won’t lose as much bodyfat. You’ll also be more likely to injure yourself if you work out while following a very-low-carb diet because your muscles won’t be holding as much water and glycogen, both of which serve as structural supports for the tissues. All of these factors will hold you back in your workout intensity.
and your recovery rate, both of which will slow your overall progress. This is why very low-carb diets aren’t the best solution for the person whose primary goal is to get in great shape. Strictly for weight-loss purposes, there’s no doubt that low-carb diets work very well for some people, and particularly those with problems controlling blood sugar, but low-carb diets certainly aren’t ideal for exercise performance.

If you want the weight loss, steady blood sugar, and appetite control that many experience while eating low-carb without suffering from a lack of workout intensity, you can get around the dilemma by using a week-long cyclic diet plan where you have more carbs on some days and less on others. Another option is to eat carbs before and/or after your workout, but avoid or limit them at other times. When you follow a plan that includes carbohydrates only at specific times, you get to enjoy the accelerated fat loss that goes along with a reduced calorie and carb intake, while at the same time maintaining the ability to satisfy cravings and have plenty of strength and stamina for your workouts. Your intense workouts should be scheduled around the days when your carb intake or glycogen levels are higher. You should do your less taxing workouts on the low-carb days, and especially your moderate-pace cardio since that type of exercise can tap into bodyfat stores for fuel.

There are many factors that go into the design of a carb-cycling plan, and if you choose to follow one it’s very important that your workout and diet schedule coincide in a specific manner for best results. These plans need to be designed on an individual basis because there are so many factors to consider, and I’m not going to discuss anything beyond generalized diet advice in this book. I hope to write a separate book on nutrition for exercisers in the future. Until then, please visit my website, www.homeexercisecoach.com or give me a call if you’d like to set up an appointment to delve in specific diet recommendations and create a plan (perhaps a carb-cycling one) personalized to your needs. Carb-cycling is an advanced technique that is usually most appropriate after you’ve already lost the majority of your excess bodyfat through a classic calorie-controlled diet and exercise plan that includes weights and cardio. Carb-cycling diets are usually not necessary until you’ve reached the point where you only have about 10 pounds of bodyfat left to lose, not because they don’t work in other cases, but because they’re usually not worth the hassle, planning, and regimentation involved until the traditional methods stop working for you. However, some people don’t do well using traditional methods and might want to try a carb-cycling plan right off the bat, so keep it in mind if you’re having trouble losing weight and/or bodyfat with the method you’re using now.

When I talk about carbohydrates in the diet, realize that it’s not just grains and sugar I’m referring to. Fruits, veggies, dairy, and nuts all contain some carbs, and if you don’t have a particularly active job and/or you’re not exercising nearly every day, these foods alone will probably provide you with plenty of carbs to fuel your workouts. In this case, a diet containing multiple servings of fruits and vegetables per day would already be considered a “moderate-carb” plan, even if it didn’t include any grains or sugar. On the other hand, if your job is labor-intensive and/or you exercise for at least an hour nearly every day, a diet with fruits and vegetables as the only source of carbs would be considered a very-low-carb diet. Carbohydrate requirements are contingent upon activity levels. In general, nutritional needs for relatively active people are different from nutritional needs of sedentary or moderately active people. In Reference B you’ll find a summary of important nutrition issues for exercisers.

For a moment, I’d like to return to the point that it’s better to eat small portions and eat frequently. Above and beyond the positive effect this has on exercise results and performance, providing your body with a steady supply of food will go a long way toward reducing your bodyfat percentage. In many cases, making the change to eating the right foods in the right quantities every few hours will make more of a difference than exercise when it comes to stripping off bodyfat! Of course, exercise does wonders and is an important piece of the puzzle for reducing bodyfat. The good news is that a steady supply of food happens to work synergistically when combined with exercise – it’s really the two together that have such an incredibly powerful effect on the way you look and feel.

As you may have begun to deduce by this point, if you want to lose weight it really doesn’t matter whether you burn more calories from activity to create your calorie deficit or whether you cut out the calories from your diet instead. Now, this doesn’t mean that you don’t need to exercise at all, because exercise has positive effects on your metabolism above and beyond the number of calories burned while exercising. Exercise also improves nutrient partitioning, which means that your body starts to put more incoming calories toward muscle building and maintenance, leaving fewer calories available to be stored as bodyfat. Completing at least 2-3 weight-training and cardio sessions per week will allow you to reap the benefits of exercise on your body composition (the amount of lean weight compared to the amount of bodyfat you carry). You need to spend about 30 minutes on weight training and 30 minutes on cardio 2-3 days per week to enjoy the full benefits of improved nutrient partitioning and body composition. At the
same time, these 2-3 workouts per week also have influence on the calorie-burning end. Exercise encourages your body to burn calories from bodyfat instead of muscle when it has to tap into stored energy for fuel.

Additional exercise beyond this minimum recommendation will burn extra calories and allow you to build even more muscle, but will only be useful for weight management if you’re having trouble manipulating your diet to create that 500-calorie energy deficit. Most people would rather run 30 minutes and have just 1 cup of pasta at dinner than run 60 minutes and have 2 cups (the 250 calories you can save by having 1 cup of pasta instead of 2 is about the same that you’d burn running an extra 30 minutes). If you would rather do the extra exercise in order to be able to eat more, that’s fine, but just keep in mind that you might be putting yourself at risk for injuries, exhaustion, burnout, and overtraining syndrome (you can read more about overtraining syndrome in Strategy 29).

Of course, some people have physique goals that reach beyond basic weight maintenance and health. Only if you truly aspire to reach the very top level of fitness, complete with a ripped, head-turning body (and you’re willing and able to work hard and sacrifice for it) is it necessary to do all of that extra training on top of having a great diet. If you want bulging muscles or a ripped six-pack, you may have to do much more than 2-3 hours a week – unless you have incredible genetics, you’ll have to do 1-2 hours a day. For the average person that just wants to look good and be fit while still having a life outside the gym, maintaining a good diet allows you to “get away” with spending less time exercising and still get the results you want.

Before you think you’ll never have time to reach a high level of fitness, realize that there are other ways to increase your calorie burn and improve nutrient partitioning besides spending more time exercising. You must be aware that certain types of exercise result in a greater number of calories burned over the 24-hour period following your workout session.

What most people don’t know about moderate cardiovascular activity such as walking is that this type of exercise (steady-pace cardio) only burns calories during the time you are actually performing the activity, whereas there are other types of exercise that have a metabolism-boosting effect for the entire 24-hour period following your workout. While the number of calories burned during your exercise session is important, it’s more effective for weight management and bodyfat loss to do exercise that also generates a post-exercise calorie burn. See, the calories burned during a typical exercise session aren’t going to be significant enough to result in very much weight loss, especially when compared to the number of calories contained in food. For instance, a 180-pound person burns about 200 calories walking for a 30 minutes at 4 m.p.h. (this is a pretty good clip – most people break into a jog at 5 m.p.h.). Unfortunately, eating a couple of small cookies or ¾ of a candy bar will put those 200 calories right back into your body, leaving you back where you started calorie-wise. So you will get much more “bang” for your exercise “buck” if you perform more of the types of exercise that boost your metabolism for an entire day. This will allow you to burn much more fat than if you just stick to steady-pace cardio.

If you raise your metabolism by using specific techniques such as performing the metabolism-boosting types of exercise, you might not even have to do any steady-pace cardio in order to lose weight and keep it off. That means you can enjoy fat loss without having to endure hour-long aerobics classes, 5-mile jogs, or long, sweaty sessions on the stairmaster. And if you do opt to partake in steady-pace cardio, you will know that all the work is going toward a loss of bodyfat, because you will have already created an energy deficit even before the additional cardio is taken into consideration.

Now, we’ll take a look at which exercises fall into this category, as well as the seven most important things you can do to raise your metabolism, either by increasing your daily calorie needs or by preventing a drop in your metabolic rate.
The 7 Keys to Raising Your Metabolism for Life

As a fitness professional with countless hours of research and experience under my belt helping clients re-shape their bodies, I have formulated a recipe for success in the quest for achieving a fit, tight body. It consists of seven components you should strive to incorporate into your life if you want to get and stay lean. After you have studied these principles, you will be ready for the Strategy sections of this book where you will pick up tips to help you apply them. The Strategy sections will serve as a guide to help you form your goals, and are designed to ensure that you’re able to apply what you’re learning to your life.

I think you’ll agree that it’s not enough just to know what to do – many people know what they should do, but if they don’t actually follow through and do it, what’s the point? Likewise, all the discipline and ambition in the world won’t do you any good if you don’t know what’s effective and what’s not. Most of the books on health, fitness, and dieting that I’ve seen focus either on information (what you should do) or on motivation/behavior modification (how to get yourself to actually do it). This System is different because it brings these two critical pieces together, and both are imperative to your success.

This section covers the “7 Keys,” which spell out exactly what you need to do to raise your metabolism. It also explains (in everyday language) why these methods work. The information contained in this section will cut through all the confusing advice to clearly reveal which actions and goals will lead to the results you’re after. All the goals that lead to success in health, fitness and weight loss will align with these seven principles of metabolism in some manner. If you follow them, you are sure to develop a lean, fit and healthy body.

Key 1: Progressive resistance training

Resistance training is an umbrella term for exercises using free weights or weight-stack machines and exercises using your bodyweight as resistance (such as push-ups). You must perform compound exercises (those that involve movement across multiple joints and utilize more than one muscle group) for both the upper and lower body if you’re serious about stimulating your metabolism. Compound exercises are most effective when performed to near or absolute muscular failure, meaning that the weight is heavy enough to cause your muscles to give up at or before you’ve completed 15 repetitions (reps) with correct form. The metabolism-boosting compound exercises include squats, deadlifts, leg press, and lunges for the lower body, and chest press, shoulder press, pulldowns, and rows for the upper body.

Isolation exercises are those that involve movement across only one joint and target just one muscle at a time. These exercises (such as a bicep curl) can be useful for maximizing the development of individual muscles. However, isolation exercises aren’t the most efficient or effective way to develop a base of lean body mass, which is the most important factor for your metabolism. Isolation exercises also won’t do much for your appearance if you have a layer of fat covering your muscles. It’s the compound exercises that will lead to a leaner body the quickest. When you do compound exercises you can lift relatively heavier weights because more than one muscle group is involved – meaning you get faster results. And, since compound exercises are so intense and use so many muscles at once, a full-body routine doesn’t take very long to do, yet it burns lots of calories and helps reduce bodyfat. That will leave you with more time to spend on cardio if you choose, which will accelerate your loss of bodyfat.

Compound exercises offer another bonus for dieters – performing them helps you maintain muscle and bone tissue while you’re dieting. Each pound of muscle you build will burn about 35 extra calories per day (1). That's the reason why men can usually eat more than women without putting on bodyfat – they carry more muscle, and consequently require more calories. Athletes, who tend to be more muscular than the average person, also eat a high number of calories and stay lean. If you lose muscle while dieting, your daily calorie needs (your maintenance calorie level) goes down, making it harder to lose weight. Think how much easier it would be to create your 500-calorie deficit if you could build more muscle! If you build and maintain just five pounds of muscle, every day whether you exercise or not you will burn at least 175 extra calories. That’s the same calorie burn you’d get from taking nearly a two-mile walk, every day. That sure makes dieting easier!

For your resistance training, be sure to focus on the compound movements, since they use the most muscle tissue. You should choose a weight that allows you to perform 8-12 repetitions with correct form before your muscle gives up. In some cases you might go with more or less reps – anything from 3 reps up to 20 reps has its place at times. You can’t go wrong with 8-12, though, because that range has been proven over and over to produce results. Just keep in mind that, in general, it’s better to choose a heavier weight
than it is to keep increasing reps, especially once you’re able to complete 15 reps with good form using a particular weight. If you have been lifting consistently for at least three months, you should make sure to lift in the 5-8-rep range at times. Mixing up your workouts ensures that you won’t get stuck in a training rut where you make little or no progress.

Once you’re at the point where you’re completely happy with the way you look and feel, you can simply continue performing the same workouts you’ve been doing to maintain your fitness level. However, if you want to continue to reduce bodyfat and raise your metabolism further, you’ll need to keep pushing yourself. Even if you haven’t been able to manage 15 reps with a certain weight, try a heavier weight anyway after a month or two. You might surprise yourself – when you go back to the original weight you’ll probably get more reps than you did before. That’s because your muscles will be forced to adapt to the new weight, which makes the lighter weights feel so much easier.

It’s especially important to work the legs, butt, and back during resistance training because they are the largest muscles in the body and consequently will increase your metabolism the most when you exercise them. Don’t make the mistake of skipping lower body exercises when you do your resistance training just because you “work” your legs with cycling or running. Cardio doesn’t train the muscles the same way as resistance training – no matter how much cardio you do or how vigorously you do it, you still need to perform the compound lifts for your legs. If you’re training really hard with cardio you will probably need to limit your resistance training to two full-body workouts per week to avoid overtraining, but you definitely want to hit all of your muscles with resistance training at least twice per week.

As you develop and condition your muscles by doing resistance training, the fat will start melting away and you will be left with a tight, toned, and shapely physique. As an added bonus, by developing the key areas through the proper weight-training program your body will begin to burn more calories every day. This saves you from having to go on a super-strict diet or from having to endure hours of cardio to keep the fat off. And just when you thought it couldn’t get any better, wait until you hear this: Resistance training improves your body’s ability to handle carbohydrates. When you have been faithful to a resistance-training routine your body gets better at taking glucose into the muscles to be stored as glycogen, which means there’s less of a chance there will be any calories left over to be converted into bodyfat. You’ll also find that your blood sugar level is steadier when you’ve been doing resistance training, which leads to higher and more consistent energy levels, fewer food cravings, a lower risk for developing diabetes, and less abdominal fat.

Also, don’t forget that you’ll want to have a firm body once the bodyfat you’re targeting starts to come off. The most common result people want out of exercise is weight loss, but that’s followed closely behind by “toning.” “Toning” simply means an increase in muscle size and a decrease in bodyfat. Besides simply building muscle and helping you reduce bodyfat, however, resistance training makes you smaller at a given weight, since muscle is quite a bit denser than fat. In fact, 10 pounds of fat takes up the same amount of space as 17 pounds of muscle (2). As long as you keep up with your resistance training, you will fit into smaller clothing sizes even if you don’t lose weight. Of course, if you do lose weight while staying consistent with your resistance-training routine you’ll be much, much smaller! You’ll look more compact, tight, and sleek all the time if you keep up with your resistance training. Both men and women look better when they weight-train in conjunction with dieting — most people don’t find skin and bones to be very attractive.

Even if you think you have plenty of muscle already, if you’re successful with fat loss you will inevitably end up losing some muscle along the way. The only weapon you have to guard against that process is resistance training. And remember, besides the fact that muscle is what gives your body a toned look, muscle tissue burns lots of calories every day to maintain itself (whereas excess bodyfat burns virtually none). The most important key to your long-term weight-loss success is to maintain as much muscle as possible while dieting. And ladies, don’t worry it’s extremely rare to find a women who has anything close to the hormonal makeup necessary to build a “manly” or “bulky” physique, especially when she’s also doing cardio and following a weight-loss diet. Even if a woman does have the ability to build lots of muscle, unless she’s eating above maintenance calories she won’t gain an ounce. When a female performs resistance training, it simply helps her develop feminine curves and it raises her metabolism, helping her keep the fat off for good.

Resistance training is the best weapon you have for firming and re-shaping your body. The heavier and more intensely you weight-train, the faster you’ll re-shape your body, and the greater your post-workout calorie burn will be. Intensity can be achieved in a number of different ways, the most straightforward being the amount of weight used during resistance training. The post-workout calorie burn
I’ve been talking about can last for up to 24 hours after the workout, and if you work hard enough to trigger it, you’ll burn more calories than you normally would all day and night, even while you’re sleeping. Keep in mind, the post-workout calorie burn is in addition to the calories burned during the actual workout, and of course the calories burned during the actual workout will be higher the harder you work during your weight training.

**Key 2: Stabilize blood sugar levels by eating meals and snacks containing protein, carbs, and fat every few hours**

The importance of this key for getting lean cannot be overstated. Eating small meals and snacks every few hours works like a charm to improve health, productivity, mood, muscle tone, energy level, and bodyfat percentage. That’s just a short list of the benefits, by the way.

Ideally you want each meal, mini-meal, or snack to contain a significant amount of each macronutrient (the three macronutrients are protein, carbs, and fat). It’s not necessary to keep any specific macronutrient ratio – as long as you get some of each in most of your meals and snacks you should be fine. You might be familiar with the “Zone” diet, which requires that 40% of calories in each meal or snack come from carbs, 30% come from fat, and 30% come from protein. As it turns out, the “Zone” also dictates the number of calories to eat. The relatively low calorie level is really the reason the diet works, at least in the beginning. The problem with the Zone is that calories are set at such a low level that your metabolism is likely to slow, which is the reason why many people plateau pretty quickly on that plan.

Even though it’s not important that each meal or snack contain a particular macronutrient ratio, it is important that you consume enough of the essential nutrients each day to keep your metabolism running at maximum efficiency. One of the essentials is protein. To maximize metabolism, dieters should consume at least 1 gram of protein per pound of bodyweight each day.

To see how this recommendation relates to food, I’ll use a skinless chicken breast half (4 oz. of chicken) as an example. 4 oz. of chicken breast contains about 25 grams of protein. If you weigh 150 pounds and are dieting, you need 150 grams of protein (1 gram x 150 pounds) a day. Each gram of protein contains 4 calories, so the 25 grams of protein in the chicken contributes 100 calories from protein to the diet (25 grams x 4 calories per gram = 100). You need 600 calories from protein per day to meet the guideline (150 pound person x 1 gram of protein per pound x 4 calories per gram = 600).

Besides protein, the only real macronutrient requirement for your health is that you get your essential fatty acids (EFAs). Many people choose to supplement to be sure they get enough EFAs on a regular basis. Fish oil capsules fit the bill here – 3-6 grams per day should do the trick. I recommend leaning toward six when you’re dieting because EFAs, although they are a fat themselves, facilitate the burning of bodyfat, especially when you’re running a calorie deficit. EFAs also offer a host of other health benefits. Although protein and EFAs are the only macronutrients that you must include in your diet to stay healthy (since your body can’t produce those compounds on it’s own), you still need to maintain the correct energy balance and get all the necessary micronutrients (vitamins and minerals). That means you’re going to need other sources of calories besides protein and EFAs. In case you were wondering, consuming more protein and EFAs beyond the recommended amount won’t do much of anything. In other words, it’s not ideal to get all your calories from protein and EFAs, and in fact it would be harmful to do so because you wouldn’t be getting all the important micronutrients found in other food groups. Once you meet your protein and EFA requirements, you should obtain the rest of your calories from other sources.

To figure out how many calories you require each day to reach your goals, you need to start by finding your maintenance calorie level. You might know (or be able to estimate) this number if you’ve counted calories in the past. If you’ve never tracked your calories closely, you can estimate your maintenance calorie level using an easy formula. Simply find your daily activity level and the amount of exercise you do in the chart on the next page, then take your total body weight and multiply it by the number indicated in the chart.
Daily Activity level* | Exercise | Multiplier**
---|---|---
Sedentary | 0-2 hours per week | 10 x TBW
Sedentary | 2-6 hours per week | 12 x TBW
Sedentary | 6+ hours per week | 14 x TBW
Moderately active | 0-2 hours per week | 12 x TBW
Moderately active | 2-6 hours per week | 14 x TBW
Moderately active | 6+ hours per week | 16 x TBW
Very active | 0-2 hour per week | 14 x TBW
Very active | 2-6 hours per week | 16 x TBW
Very active | 6+ hours per week | 18 x TBW

* Daily activity level does not include exercise.
** Adjust up 1 or 2 points for males and for lean individuals.
Adjust down 1 or 2 points for females and those with a high bodyfat %.

The number you get should approximate your maintenance calorie level per day. These numbers are estimates at best, so it’s still a good idea to track your calorie intake for at least a week. If you track your calorie intake for a week, it will allow you to pinpoint the calorie level that you require to maintain your weight. Once you find your “real” maintenance calorie level by monitoring your diet, you can find your own personal multiplier by dividing your maintenance calorie level by your weight. Generally, if your multiplier varies from the table above it’s usually because you don’t have an “average” bodyfat percentage. That means the multiplier in the table might be one or two numbers too high for people who have a higher bodyfat percentage, and one or two numbers too low for people who have a lower bodyfat percentage. Because women tend to have a higher bodyfat percentage than men, adjust your multiplier according to your gender and your build if you choose to estimate your maintenance calorie level by using the numbers in the table.

Once you know or have an estimate of your maintenance calorie level, you might need to add or subtract calories from that figure to find the number that you should shoot for per day. Whether you add calories or subtract them will depend on your goals. If your primary goal is fat loss, you should subtract 500 calories from your maintenance calorie level. That will allow for the 500-calorie deficit recommended for fat loss. Add 250 to your maintenance number if your primary goal is to build muscle. This will put you in the calorie surplus that is recommended for muscle gain. If you don’t want to change your weight and aren’t going to use a cyclic diet, you should stick with your maintenance calorie level.

Once you know how many calories to consume each day, take 20-30% of that number. That’s the approximate number of calories you should obtain from dietary fat. Each gram of fat contains 9 calories, so by dividing the calories from fat by 9 you can figure out how many grams of fat to shoot for. For instance, if you need 2000 calories per day to reach your goals, 20-30% of 2000 calories is 400-600 calories. If you divide 400-600 by 9, you’ll find that you should consume 44-66 grams of fat per day. Going back to the chicken breast example, 4 oz. of skinless chicken breast contains about 3 grams of fat, or 27 calories from fat (3 grams x 9 calories per gram = 27). Keep in mind, your EFAs need to be included as part of your fat intake, even if you take them in pill form (each 1000mg (1 gram) pill contains 1 gram of fat or 9 calories).

If you’ve been following along, you should have already figured out how many calories to obtain from protein (you want 1 gram per pound of bodyweight, and each gram of protein contains 4 calories). After you know how many calories to obtain from protein and how many to obtain from fat, add those two figures together and then subtract that number from your total calories per day. This shows you how many calories you have left after you’ve met the guidelines for protein and fat. After you’ve met your protein and fat requirements, the rest of your calories for the day can come from carbohydrates, including those found in whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, dairy products, and any refined grains or sugars you consume. If you have alcohol or “non-impact carbs” like fiber, glycerol, or sugar alcohols, include those calories as part of your calories from carbs, simply because they clearly aren’t proteins or fats, and those calories still need to be counted toward your daily total. Many protein bars and "low-carb" products will have these “non-impact carbs.” The carbs in these products are called “non-impact” because they don’t increase your blood sugar level like most carbs do, but they still provide calories to the body. That’s why the calories don’t always add up if you do the math on some of those protein bars. That is, if you take the carbohydrate grams listed on the label multiplied by 4, add that to the protein grams multiplied by 4, and add that to the fat grams multiplied by 9, the calorie total you get might be lower than the total calories listed on the product. By the time of this printing, the non-impact carbs don’t have to be listed in the carb...
count from a legal standpoint, although this can be misleading because “non-impact” carbs still contribute calories to the food.

When choosing your meals and snacks, your best bet is to choose carbohydrates of the complex variety, which, along with eating every few hours, keeps your blood sugar regulated and your glucose metabolism in top-notch condition. The fiber in the complex carbs, along with including moderate amounts of protein and fat in each meal or snack, will help slow digestion. This keeps insulin under control, which helps reduce bodyfat. Including protein, fat, and fiber in each meal also keeps you feeling full longer so you won’t be starving again an hour or two after you eat. Eating frequently also helps control hunger – if you eat every few hours, you should never get so ravenously hungry that you lose control. Dieters actually should eat more frequently than those who just want to maintain their weight. This is because dieters need to take extra precaution against the plummeting energy level and hunger pains that are more likely to occur when you’re running a calorie deficit.

Although eating more frequently tends to promote diet compliance because it helps fight hunger, you might find that sticking to just three meals per day works well for you (notice that I didn’t say one or two meals!) If you stick to “3 squares” and are happy with the results, there’s no reason to force yourself to eat more often. However, if you’ve been doing three meals and still have stubborn areas on your body that haven’t firmed up, or you find that you’re otherwise hitting a plateau, consider eating more often for a trial period to see if it makes a difference. Also, if you find your energy level flagging or your fat loss slowing to a crawl, it might be time to try eating more often. This could mean 4-6 mini-meals per day, or three meals and a couple of snacks. All you really need to do to get your 4-6 “meals” is have a little less food at your three main meals and add two between-meal snacks, which can be a nutrition bar or nutrition shake. Many people find that the extra energy and faster rate of fat loss are worth the inconvenience of having to eat more often. With all the meal replacement products out there today (you can even buy them at convenience stores now), finding convenient sources of nutrition isn’t very difficult at all. If you choose to rely on some of these nutrition products, sample a variety of brands and flavors to figure out which ones you like and then order them in bulk to save money. Experiment to find the number of meals and snacks that works best for you. Keep in mind that the leaner you get, the more tinkering you may need to do if you want to keep pushing for more fat loss.

Key 3: Perform 3-5 cardio workouts per week

Some people like it and most people hate it, but to lose weight faster you simply must do it! Cardio helps with fat loss in a myriad of ways. It burns calories, resulting in pounds lost as long as your diet is in order. Cardio helps regulate blood sugar and appetite. Dieters that perform cardio also tend to maintain more lean body mass (when the cardio is done in reasonable amounts, which I will define shortly). Cardio also promotes the mobilization and loss of bodyfat. These things are true of cardio in general, but high-intensity cardio is clearly superior for losing bodyfat, especially toward the end of a diet. If you are looking at the last 10-20 pounds of a diet, all else being equal, you will always lose faster and be leaner if you perform interval training or some other type of high-intensity cardiovascular workout.

Interval training consists of alternating periods of recovery-pace cardio (such as a 3-m.p.h. flat walk) with periods of all-out effort (such as a sprint). If you do this type of training, you can crank up your metabolism to get that post-exercise calorie burn, similar to what happens when you weight-train. In addition, you will burn more calories per minute of exercise with interval training than you ever could with steady-pace cardio.

Before you get too excited by all the calorie-blasting possibilities, know that high-intensity training is not something you should undertake every day. You can do one or two all-out cardio workouts per week for up to six weeks at a time before you should take a month off from such strenuous activity. If you choose to do more than two cardio workouts per week in total, the rest of your workouts should be easy to moderate-intensity.

Shoot for 3-5 cardio workouts per week (20-60 minutes each) if you want to make a significant difference in the number of calories you burn per day. 20 minutes is fine if you’re doing cardio primarily for heart health, but spend longer if your purpose is to increase your rate of weight loss. The 3-5 days is a recommendation, but not a requirement – one or two days is so much better than none (you don’t want to think, “If I can’t do five days it isn’t worth it to do any at all). If you are looking to increase your metabolism as much as you can, you should push yourself during the 1-2 intense workouts you’re
“allowed” per week. One of your intense workouts might be a 30-minute bike ride pedaling as vigorously as you can, and another could be the interval sprints described above. Supplement this work with up to three lower-intensity cardio sessions, which might include one moderate-pace bike ride, one brisk walk, and one easy to moderate-intensity session on the stairmaster at the gym, for example.

The better you can condition your cardiovascular system, the more calories you will be able to burn during your cardio, which will help with fat loss. Cardio also promotes fat loss for another reason – it increases circulation to the peripheral regions of the body. The increased circulation helps to mobilize fat in the “stubborn areas” so that it can be burned for energy. In females, the stubborn fat deposits are typically found on the hips and thighs, while in males they are typically found on the stomach and lower back. These fat deposits are referred to as “stubborn” because even individuals who are at their ideal weight and bodyfat percentage can still have excess fat in these areas. Also, the body quite often will start burning muscle before it will burn off the “stubborn” fat deposits, unless you know how to circumvent this problem. Cardio, and especially high-intensity interval training, is the best weapon you have for tackling stubborn fat deposits. Reducing carbohydrate intake and alcohol intake is the second-best weapon you have for fighting stubborn fat deposits.

To understand more about burning fat, you have to know that there are two types of fat that are important to human metabolism. Visceral fat is the fat deep inside your body that is found surrounding your organs. Too much visceral fat can make your stomach look bloated or distended. Visceral fat is usually the first to go on a diet, even if you’re not doing cardio. There is an exception to this rule, though, and it applies to steroid and andro users. The reason is that testosterone tends to increase the ratio of visceral fat to subcutaneous fat. Subcutaneous fat, the second type, is the fat lying just underneath the skin. Cardio tends to burn the subcutaneous fat that is harder to take off just by dieting. Not only does cardio help with weight loss by burning calories in general, but it also helps to facilitate the mobilization of bodyfat, particularly in stubborn areas that diet and weight training alone won’t always address. See, even if you are running a calorie deficit, if you don’t mobilize the fat molecules so they can leave the fat cells to be burned for energy you won’t lose bodyfat – you’ll burn muscle instead. Cardio helps to circumvent this problem.

As long as you aren’t significantly overweight, the most effective cardiovascular activities for weight loss are the ones that burn the most calories per minute. Climbing (both hills and stairs), a vigorous effort on an elliptical cross-trainer, and running fall into this category. Bicycling and walking are better choices for the significantly overweight and for beginners. If you are just starting an exercise program, it’s a good idea to stick to bicycling, flat or 1-5% incline-walking, or an elliptical trainer on an easy setting until you have developed a base of cardiovascular fitness. Once you’ve established a foundation, you can build up to higher intensities if desired. People who are just starting out get so much out of just doing something that you should take advantage and move, but don’t push yourself to the limit. As a beginner, you don’t need to do that in order to see results, and it’s not even healthy to tax yourself to that degree at this point. Just get yourself into a routine and you will eventually achieve all your goals.

**Key 4: Pursue active recreation**

If you spend your free time engaging in active pursuits, you will burn extra calories and have fun at the same time. What could be easier? Watching TV and sitting at the computer are the worst things you can do for your waistline (actually, eating junk food at the same time would be worse, but you get the idea).

If you don’t already partake, think of things you used to do as a kid or that you have done in the past and make these activities a regular habit. Bring a friend or family member along to enjoy the activity with you. Skiing, pickup basketball, hiking, tennis, gardening, and leisurely bike rides are just a few of your options. Do you have any other ideas? You will burn lots of calories and have tons of fun. Another thing you might consider is completing household jobs like mowing the lawn, walking the dog or shoveling the driveway yourself instead of handing off that chore to a family member or hiring someone to do it. You can earn some brownie points or save a few bucks and burn some serious calories at the same time.

Sports are another fun way to become more active. Find an adult intramurals program or join a team! You’ll be so focused on the game and so pumped up on adrenaline that you will hardly notice when you start breaking a sweat! Before you know it, you’ll have blasted hundreds of calories without thinking too much about it.

**Key 5: On the job (or at home), move!**
Whenever you have a choice, always choose movement. When there are boxes to be carried or errands that can be run on foot, be the first to volunteer. If you are talking on the phone, stand up and walk around the room instead of sitting. Park in the furthest spot away from the entrance to a store, not in the closest! Someone else will love to find that close spot, and you know that you could use the extra walking. It’s funny that in today’s world every effort is made to do less physical work – and look where it got us! Over half of American adults are overweight. Yikes! In our relentless pursuit of convenience and ease of living, we have made ourselves as a society sick and unhealthy.

Walking for leisure, playing with your kids, or walking the dog are other ways to boost your calorie burn for the day. These activities won’t help your system upgrade its metabolism like the tougher cardio unless you are extremely out of shape, but they will burn extra calories, and every little bit helps when you’re trying to lose weight. You’re also less likely to snack when you keep moving, because you’re kept busy for one thing, but also because physical activity leads to the release of endorphins, which make you feel good and therefore less likely to eat when you’re not hungry.

Key 6: Consider supplements

Although many supplements make outrageous claims regarding the muscle gain or fat loss you will experience if you take them, supplements offer the most value when they are used to correct vitamin and mineral deficiencies. Did you know that a deficiency in any vitamin or mineral sets you up for a metabolic slowdown? All the processes the body depends on to function at its peak require that the essential vitamins and minerals be available in sufficient quantity, sometimes on a daily basis. For instance, the water-soluble vitamins cannot be stored in the body for any significant length of time. If you don’t get the right amounts on a daily basis, your body will suffer the consequences. If you think this can’t be affecting you, realize that some people have felt “sick” for so long that it feels normal to them! They don’t realize why they can’t seem to get going without their giant cup of coffee, why they want to lie on the couch watching TV all day, or why they can’t seem to muster up the energy to exercise. Although there is no “magic” supplement that burns fat like crazy, never underestimate the power of optimizing your body’s functioning. If you eat nutritious foods, supplement as needed, and exercise, your body will respond more favorably than if you neglected to do those things but took all the weight-loss drugs in the world.

Unfortunately, it’s hard to get all the necessary micronutrients from your diet no matter how “healthy” you eat, although in the past they were readily available in our food. Most of our food today has been stripped of its vitamins and minerals by all the food processing. Sometimes food companies add synthetic vitamins and minerals to their foods to try to make up for what is missing. “Enriched” products are made in this way. The “enriched” products will never be as nutritious as fresh, unprocessed food, but unfortunately high-quality, nutritious food is harder and harder (and much more expensive when you look to organic products, which aren’t necessarily more nutritious) to come by these days. A multivitamin/mineral can go a long way toward setting you straight. A generic brand right from the pharmacy or supermarket will be your most economical (and still effective) option, but it’s true that you will tend to get a slightly better rate of absorption if you opt for the high-end stuff from a health and nutrition store.

Looking beyond the deficiency issue, sometimes there is a discrepancy between minimum and optimal micronutrient levels, particularly for exercisers. The recommended daily allowances (RDAs) for vitamins and minerals are set at the minimum amounts that appear to be required to avoid being sick, but those amounts aren’t necessarily enough for a person to thrive.

Certain substances, one being creatine monohydrate, produce a significant effect when taken in doses that are impossible to obtain through food alone. Creatine is found in red meat, but you’d need to eat pounds of it every day to obtain what’s considered to be a pharmaceutical dose of creatine. You can get by just fine without the extra creatine, but your friend who is following the same program and also supplementing with creatine will be leaner and stronger, with a higher metabolism and a lower bodyfat percentage.

Although creatine is the most noteworthy example, you may want to educate yourself on which supplements might be worth your while to use at times, particularly in cases where it’s difficult, if not impossible, to obtain sufficient quantities of the substance simply by following a balanced diet. There is a good deal of controversy surrounding supplement recommendations, and you must be wary of distributors’ claims since many are just looking to make a quick buck. However, not everything is snake oil, because the science is there to back up many of the claims that particular supplements are effective.

Some experts believe that vitamin C, for one, should be taken in megadoses while dieting.
antioxidant reduces free radicals and is known to aid in immunity and recovery. By maximizing your body’s functioning, supplements like vitamin C can contribute to a higher metabolism.

Fish oil is another great supplement. If you live in the U.S. and don’t supplement with essential fatty acids (EFAs), chances are you’re deficient in them. When you have an EFA deficiency, you won’t burn fat as efficiently and you’ll have a tendency to lose lean body mass. The reason most people are deficient in EFAs is that, for the past 50 years or so, our food has been produced in a way that destroys naturally occurring EFAs in the diet. Unless you eat 4-6 oz. of the fattier fish (like salmon) at least twice per week or take two tablespoons of flaxseed or one tablespoon of flax oil every day, you are almost guaranteed to be deficient in the EFAs. Flaxseed isn’t part of the mainstream American diet, and it can be risky to eat fish today due to the mercury content in seafood. I recommend 3-6 grams of fish oil taken daily for all the EFA supplementation you need.

Calcium is another biggie – this mineral promotes bone health, proper electrolyte balance, and fat loss. While calcium is important for everyone’s bone health, women, and post-menopausal women in particular, are at a higher risk for osteoporosis. The recommendation for the number of dairy servings per day is higher for that group than for any other, yet post-menopausal women as group need fewer calories per day than everyone except the elderly. That means calcium supplements are especially helpful for post-menopausal women. Strong bones are one of the components of your lean body mass that helps keep metabolism high. You also need those bones to be strong so you can stay healthy and perform your workouts safely. Moreover, there have been a slew of studies done on calcium and fat loss in the past few years. It has been proven that calcium intake dictates rate of weight loss, even at the same calorie level (3). High-calcium groups lose 2-3 times the fat and 1/3 less muscle than low/moderate-calcium groups. This can mean the difference of losing 8 pounds of fat rather than just 3, while only losing 2 pounds of muscle instead of 3. In this example, the net weight loss would be 10 pounds in the high calcium group versus just 6 pounds in the low/moderate calcium group. Body composition is improved even more dramatically with a high-calcium intake. The low/moderate calcium group loses equal amounts of muscle and fat (and therefore, in spite of losing weight, stays at the same bodyfat percentage). On the other hand, the high-calcium group loses 8 pounds of fat and only 2 pounds of muscle! The low/moderate calcium group loses fat and muscle in a 1:1 ratio while dieting, but the high-calcium group loses fat at a 4:1 ratio to muscle. This means, for every 4 pounds of fat lost in the high-calcium group, only 1 pound of muscle is lost along with it. That’s a very good ratio to achieve while dieting, since sometimes people lose even more muscle than fat when they’re dieting.

Calcium makes a good case for the power of supplementation, since many people fall short of the recommended 3-4 servings of dairy products per day (900-1200 mg of calcium). It is true that you usually get better results consuming your nutrients from food rather than from supplements. However, a dietary supplement is far better than nothing and is invaluable in helping you fill the gaps in your diet.

Key 7: Get a good night’s rest

6-9 hours of sleep (whichever amount leaves you feeling like you had a great night’s rest and allows you to wake up without needing an alarm clock) sets the stage for an efficiently running metabolism. Chronic sleep loss affects the processing and storing of carbohydrates and the regulation of hormone secretion in the body. The effect can be so drastic that after just one week of poor sleep the changes in the body resemble the effects of advanced age and the early stages of diabetes (4). Getting too little sleep also increases the secretion of cortisol, a stress hormone that eats away at muscle and bone tissue and increases the deposition of abdominal fat. Yes, you can be so stressed out that you develop a gut! Maybe the phrase “beauty rest” isn’t just a saying! If you have a roll of fat around the middle but don’t have excess fat anywhere else, you can be pretty sure that cortisol is to blame.

So how does one get enough sleep? Well, the answer depends on the reason you might be a poor sleeper. Some people feel tired but purposefully stay up late and awaken early in an attempt to get more done. If you’ve been guilty of this, don’t bother. You’re harming your body too much, and it has been proven that sleep-deprived people are less productive during the day. Discipline yourself to stick to a set bedtime, and avoid watching TV or doing stressful work in bed.

Also, you can’t expect to get a good night’s sleep after drinking coffee or cola all day. Even if you are able to fall asleep initially, having caffeine in your system (this drug has a 4-hour half life, so yes, it is still in your system) makes for a less restful, less restorative sleep. You won’t be able to hit the deep phases of sleep and stay there for the normal length of time if you’ve been using caffeine during the day. And the
more caffeine you consume, the more harmful the effects. If you really love your coffee, 1 or 2 cups of joe in the morning shouldn’t do much harm, although you would be healthier and would probably feel better in the long run without it. Consider switching to tea, which has less caffeine than coffee and contains other beneficial compounds that are good for your metabolism and your health. If you must have caffeine, have it as early in the day as possible. Keep in mind that quitting caffeine cold turkey usually results in headaches, lethargy, and temporary depression. It’s recommended to wean off of caffeine over a period of 7-14 days.

If you’re not sleeping well and these simple sleep habits don’t help, you might need to see a sleep specialist. For more tips, turn to page 256 where you’ll find the Better Sleep Council’s “Ten Tips for Better Sleep.” Just be sure that you don’t put sleep on the back burner, because it’s critically important on so many levels.

Well, there you have it: The seven foolproof tactics to raising your metabolism that you can start applying to your life – every one of them is guaranteed to affect your metabolism and your physique for the better. If you’re following at least some of these principles and you’re taking in a good amount of healthful calories, you should be able to lose unwanted bodyfat to the tune of 0.5-2.0 pounds per week, every week. You shouldn’t have any problems maintaining the loss and you shouldn’t hit any plateau that you can’t overcome with a bit of tweaking to your program.

The “adequate calories” piece is an important part of all this – besides all the other reasons you need to eat regularly, eating is a thermogenic activity, meaning that it uses energy. In other words, eating calories burns calories! Some people are really gung-ho when they start dieting and do everything they can think of to raise their metabolism, and also try to eat as few calories as possible using tactics such as skipping meals, avoiding animal protein, avoiding all fat and/or carbs, and eating salad every day for lunch (if they even eat lunch at all). The body will go into an emergency state at that point to conserve calories and fat stores, because it picks up pretty quickly on the energy crisis. Having a too-large calorie deficit will sabotage your long-term weight loss goals because it will cause your metabolism to slow to a crawl. The ideal situation is for you to be eating about 500 calories less than you burn each day, resulting in steady weight loss without those rapid losses and even faster re-gains, and without finding yourself stalled on that dreaded plateau. You can cut 500 calories out of your diet pretty easily if you pay attention to what you’re consuming and are aware of the calorie content in common foods and beverages. For example, you can save 500 calories by passing on three cans of soda, three glasses of juice, or three glasses of wine, by saying no to that muffin or that handful of cookies, or by leaving four spoonfuls of food on your plate at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You can also burn those 500 calories off through exercise – walking or running 5 miles will do it. Most people find that a combination of eating less and moving more is the easiest way for them to hit the 500-calorie deficit.

I know that the idea of incorporating these seven keys all at once might seem overwhelming. Don’t worry, you can start with just one – I promise you, you will notice a difference. Usually addressing just one or two of the keys will leave you with the optimal calorie deficit, especially when you’re just starting out. You can always decide to apply more of the principles in the future if you need to. You’d want to do this if you hit a plateau, or if you would like to be able to eat more than you have been and continue losing weight. Remember, think “progress” not “perfection.” Every little bit helps. The very first thing you should do is adopt a resistance-training program if you haven’t already. You’ll be on the fast track to having a lean, toned body with a smartly designed weights routine.
Strategy 1: No Fear!

How to make a commitment to change

If you are studying this System, it’s probably safe to assume that you want to change your health, your fitness, and your appearance for the better. To get started, there are only two things you need to do: make the decision to change, and the commitment to never look back. What separates those who are motivated to make the commitment from those who aren’t? The main reason you might not be determined to change a situation that has caused you pain is that you have a short-term memory. Almost every behavior that has the potential to cause pain also offers up pleasure in the short-term. If you have a short-term memory, you’ll be lured in by the short-term pleasure because you keep forgetting that the trade-off is long-term pain. Sometimes it takes hitting “rock-bottom” for a person to change, but hopefully you can make up your mind to change before it gets to that point. Ideally you will be able to use just the thought of future pain to help solidify your commitment to change now, without actually having to go through any more struggles.

You’re going to need to use the most painful thoughts, feelings, and experiences you’ve had up until this point as a motivator to make your commitment to change. A painful motivator for you might have been the time someone made fun of the way you looked, or it could have been the time you avoided the beach so that you wouldn’t be seen in a bathing suit. Maybe it was the time you found yourself gasping for breath climbing just two flights of stairs, or the time you hurt your back lifting something that really wasn’t all that heavy.

Once you have committed to your decision to change, you will have passed the most difficult battle in this process. Upon solidifying your commitment your thoughts will be freed up, allowing you to become completely focused on your mission. Outside distractions will be minimized the more determined you become. You will make all of this easier on yourself by having the mindset, “no turning back.” Rather than allow yourself to be intimidated by the process, make the choice to dive into it with no fear. This will give you the strength and the courage to change.

See, fear of change or of how you will cope robs energy from you that you simply can’t afford to waste. Your thoughts have a good chance of becoming your reality, so be sure to keep them under your control. If something sidetracks you from your plan, use the slip to intensify your motivation, rather than as an excuse to throw in the towel. Make sure you take the time to pay attention to what has happened so you don’t miss the opportunity to learn from your mistakes.

For instance, if you make the mistake of having something to eat that isn’t on your diet plan, step back from any emotional reaction you might have for a moment so you can analyze the situation. Use the information you uncover to troubleshoot so that it’s less likely to happen again. This lifestyle change you are undertaking is a process, not an event. The decision to commit to a path in the healthy direction is a one-time event, but you won’t get the steps mapped out perfectly the first time you try. Any successful lifestyle change has to be an ongoing process of testing, applying, and adapting. What works for you today might not work next year, so you’ve got to stay on your toes.

Let’s look at an instance where a mistake can be turned into a learning experience and an opportunity to adapt for the better. Here’s the scenario:

You hosted a party for a friend. Of course there were leftovers, and we’re not talking carrot sticks – it’s leftover cake and cookies. You eat some of those cookies the next day, and the day after that. You say to yourself, “enough’s enough!” but you end up having some cookies the third day, too.

As simple as this story is, it speaks volumes about human psychology and behavior. What’s going on here? Why did you eat that stuff? If you’re like most people, you tend to eat more junk food when it’s right there in front of you. Also, if you’re like most people you don’t normally go to the store just because you have a craving for cookies. Furthermore, you know that you don’t go to other people’s houses just to eat their cookies. It seems that the odds you’ll eat cookies go up tremendously when you happen to have them in the house.

Upon reaching this realization, some people decide to challenge themselves to a “battle of willpower.” They expect themselves to be able to keep cookies in the house without touching them. Well, maybe that
could work, but why not make things easier and simpler by deciding to keep your house a “cookie-free zone?” What you have to understand is that you are not a weak person simply because you haven’t been able to avoid eating those cookies. As a human being, your body is wired to crave calorie-dense foods full of fat and sugar. These foods are the ones most readily converted into bodyfat, which is something your body is wired to do for survival in case there’s a time of shortage.

Despite your best intentions, odds are you'll end up eating things you wish you hadn’t if you’re surrounded by them all the time. The fact that you want them so badly when they are within reach is a testament to your genetic qualities more than anything else. See, almost all the families that are alive today are the ones who were “better” than the rest at survival. The ones on the earth today for the most part come from hardy stock. Without that strong survival instinct, your ancestors probably would have died out during difficult times.

If this makes sense to you and you’re willing to try other solutions besides relying on “willpower,” the next step should be obvious: Don’t keep “trigger” foods in the house! Even if those foods end up on your countertop for whatever reason, you still have options. Try putting the food in the freezer until someone will take it from you, or donate it to a food pantry. Even if you end up throwing the food in the trash, it would have been “wasted” anyway if you ate it against your will, since all you’d be left with is excess weight on your body.

I know that this idea of not keeping the food at home sounds simplistic, but it’s amazing how many people refuse to “get” it and continue to sabotage themselves. Maybe it would be great if you had willpower made of steel and weren’t tempted when that fattening stuff was sitting right there in the kitchen. However, the reality is that it’s natural to be tempted by it, so why test yourself over and over and make it so difficult? Why have the tempting foods so easily accessible? The smartest thing to do, if impulse eating is a problem for you, is to use your willpower where it’s better served and more useful: When you’re in the store, use it to avoid buying junk food in the first place, or use it to avoid taking the stuff home when it’s offered to you.

This is a less arduous task and is less “dangerous” than testing yourself once you actually have the fattening foods lying around at home. If you’re like most people, your guard will be lowered in your own home, not to mention the fact that you’ll probably have more downtime at home with the kitchen at easy access. Downtime at home is a time when you’re likely to seek comfort (which some people find through eating). It’s also the time when you’re most susceptible to making an impulse decision, since your guard will be let down when you’re relaxing at home.

Downtime is not the only thing that can be damaging for your waistline, however. Stress can be just as harmful. Stress makes some people eat more, while it causes others lose their appetite. Sometimes the motivation to seek comfort in certain foods comes from the need to escape a myriad of emotions. Any emotion, whether it’s positive or negative, can trigger you to indulge in junk food or extra-large portions.

Hopefully this example of how you can take control at home will inspire you to think of other ways you can manipulate your environment to make your life easier. Once you’ve developed the capacity to separate your emotional needs from food, you will have much more control over your eating. The easiest place to start is at home, since you will have more control over your environment there. Once you develop more control over your eating in that situation, you will feel empowered to tackle obstacles in the outside world. If you’ve got things under control on the home front, you won’t have to worry about that area too much anymore and should be more confident that you can handle any temptation you may encounter in the outside world.

With all this talk about handling temptation and avoiding junk food, you might be wondering if it’s okay to treat yourself by having a food you really like that isn’t the healthiest or most diet-friendly. You’ll be happy to know that I am a firm believer in enjoying a treat once in a while. The difference between “giving in” and treating yourself is that, once you have the ability to control what you’re eating, it will be your choice to have it. Therefore, the treat will be a source of pleasure (rather than a source of pain because you feel bad for “giving in”). It will be a source of pleasure to indulge yourself once you have control because you’ll know you can choose whether or not to have it. Plus, when you’re in control, you will find it much easier to stop at one small serving and feel satisfied.

If you live by yourself, all the advice I’ve given so far should work just fine. However, things will be more complicated if you live with other people who might not be willing to give up keeping some junk food around.

If this is the case for you, the first thing you’ll need to do is clearly separate in your mind which foods are for you and which foods are for your roommate, your kids or your significant other. If you fail to do
this, you might find yourself picking from your kids’ plates after dinner or eating their snacks when they don’t finish them. You might find yourself eating your husband’s potato chips or your wife’s Ben and Jerry’s. Many times, you’re eating this stuff simply because it’s around, not because you really want it. If you can draw a clear line between what you are and are not going to eat, you can make a rule for yourself that will take away the need to make a new decision every day about whether or not you’ll eat the junk. You can certainly still treat yourself here and there, but you don’t want to be eating junk food just because it’s there. You want to save your indulgences for times when you really have a craving, and at those times should have what you want most, not just what happens to be around. You can literally start ignoring certain foods if you make the clear-cut decision that you simply don’t eat them. I’m sure that there are some foods you’ve already ruled out in your mind that simply don’t pose a problem for you anymore. Even if you’ve ruled out a food because you don’t like it, it doesn’t matter – you still have proven that it’s possible for you to rule out certain foods.

For example, let’s say that you read an article in a magazine about the ten most fattening foods you can order at a fast-food restaurant. Let’s say hypothetically that a bacon double-cheeseburger was on that list, and it contains 1,100 calories and 65 grams of fat (that number is not far off, but will vary a bit depending on where you order the sandwich). Right then and there, upon reading that information you might have decided, “I will never eat another bacon double-cheeseburger again. It’s not worth it.” Most likely, you weren’t haunted by thoughts of that sandwich (don’t laugh – people really do feel “haunted” by intense cravings) because it simply wasn’t an option for you anymore. By making it a point to mentally categorize foods, you can make following your diet plan much, much easier. To understand just how powerful this technique can be, think back to a time when you used to frequent a particular store or restaurant for a food that wasn’t the healthiest thing you could be eating. When you went there all the time, didn’t it seem like you were on automatic pilot? Wasn’t it hard to say no? If you stopped going there for whatever reason, I bet you hardly think about the place and that food anymore. I know this has happened to me many times.

If you try to create rules for yourself with food and are still struggling with having your family’s food around at home, I recommend assigning a “designated shelf” for the food that you will commit to staying away from. In the worst-case scenario where the temptation still proves to be too much, ask your family to keep the food in their bedrooms or otherwise hidden from you. This might seem silly or over-the-top, but it definitely works. Some people have a really difficult time when they are told they can’t have something, so there is a chance that you might have to resort to drastic measures if you’re serious about staying away from it. An added bonus is that, even if you do manage to stumble across the hidden food, you will probably be too embarrassed to eat any, lest the owner of the food take notice!

Now, I’d like to say a few words regarding slips off your diet plan: If this happens, it just doesn’t make sense to throw in the towel. Instead, think about the fact that you still have the same goal and are still just as determined to reach it. After a slip you’ll be armed with a new tool in your pocket, which is the experience of having a slip and figuring out what went wrong. Having gone through the experience and analyzed it, you’re less likely to allow the same mistake to happen again. After you’ve analyzed what happened, your game plan will be that much stronger. This is a very different attitude and approach from giving up and throwing in the towel after a slip. Giving up is the easiest thing to do in the short-term, but your problem will not have gone away. In the long run, learning from your mistake and moving forward will serve you so much better. You’ll be much happier and a lot more successful, too.

What if your problem with junk food isn’t really at home, but you find yourself overindulging when you’re out and about at parties or in restaurants? In this case, you can take control of your environment mentally if not physically. You need to decide before the event what you would like to do. If you’ve been following a healthy diet and feel that it’s time for a little bit of planned indulgence, decide to follow the “80/20 Rule” and take small portions of the foods you crave. For more information on the 80/20 Rule, see Reference B in the back of the book.

Maybe on a particular day you’d rather stick to your usual way of eating even though you’re going out. You can mentally “take control of your environment” just like you can physically take control over which foods you keep at home. Just make sure you decide what you will do before temptation strikes. If you’re planning to stick to eating healthy, you need to mentally remove the option to have the junk. You’ll be surprised how much easier it feels to say no when you commit to what you want to do beforehand. If any thoughts about changing your mind start to creep into your head, the key is to not even allow yourself to entertain the option of changing your mind. You can tell yourself that you’ll have the option to indulge next time if you choose, but for today you’re sticking to your decision. Being in control of what you do really
can be that simple. See Reference B for tips on how to eat healthy in all types of restaurants, including fast-food places.

You’ll want to experiment with various foods and recipes to find things you really enjoy that also happen to be healthy. Also, it will behoove you to find ways to treat yourself that don’t involve food. There are plenty of options, and you’ll get a chance to brainstorm some of them in one of the assignments for this Strategy.

No Fear! assignment

1. Forming a mission statement is common practice for most companies and organizations. The mission statement helps to align everyone’s behavior toward a common goal.

   Brainstorm some ideas for a personal “mission statement.” Your “mission statement” will help you align your thoughts and behaviors toward your desired outcome. I want you to write your mission statement as if you have already accomplished the outcome. This means it will end up looking more like a “mission accomplished statement.” One example of a “mission accomplished statement” is, “I eat 3 nutritious meals and 2 snacks every day, and follow the 80/20 Rule with food.” Another example of a “mission accomplished statement” is, “I do my weights routine and my cardio 3 times per week for 8 weeks at a time, and then I take one week off.” Once you settle on one or two “mission accomplished statements,” post them someplace where you can see them every day.

2. Start a 30-day commitment journal in a blank notebook. Write your “mission accomplished statement” in big letters on the first page. Across the top of the next three pages write, “How I used to be.” Divide each of those pages into two columns. In the first column, list the things you used to do that got you nothing but poor results. Across the page from each entry, list the painful consequences you experienced and/or the painful consequences that could be soon to come if you continue with your old ways. After you’re finished coming up with as many examples as you can, keep these pages held together with a paperclip. Only reference them if you find yourself repeating some of your old behaviors, simply to remind yourself what you should expect as a result. Occasionally you may have a need to remind yourself what doing those things got you before. Otherwise, there is no need to stay in the negative, and no sense in filling your brain with “don’ts.” Your mind will remain fixated on the words and ideas that run through your head, which means that you risk harming yourself if you ruminate about things that have gone wrong in the past. The only time it might be beneficial to think about the pain you experienced is if you find yourself tempted to stray from your commitment to change. If you have truly committed to making a change, this shouldn’t happen. However, you are only human and you might find yourself feeling tempted at times, particularly during the first two weeks of your commitment. Sometimes just the act of changing, even if it’s not such a bad change, can be tough and you might rebel since it’s more comforting to continue doing what is familiar. If you find yourself struggling to maintain your commitment, you might want to keep a reminder of the pain you experienced with you at all times to help fight off that “short-term memory” syndrome. I know people who keep a picture of themselves looking particularly out-of-shape in their day-planner or on their mirror as a constant reminder of the pain they experienced. If doing something like this helps you, then by all means do it. Just be careful not to spend too much time tossing around negative thoughts.

3. Come up with a list of foods that never seem to tempt you – list them on the next blank page of your notebook. Be sure to include all the foods that don’t tempt you – it doesn’t matter what the reason is. Some of the foods that you’ll put on your list don’t tempt you simply because you don’t like them. Others don’t tempt you because you just never eat them, or because you decided to stop eating them at one point and haven’t thought twice about it since.

   For example, my list of foods that never seem to tempt me includes pork, sausage, squash, and anything made with garlic (I don’t like them). It also includes hamburgers, fried food, and potato chips (I like them somewhat, but I stopped eating them awhile ago and don’t miss them when I don’t have them.). My list further includes full-fat ice cream, sugary cereal, and muffins. Although I like these foods, I don’t care to have them even as treats because there are plenty of other treats that are less fattening or that I enjoy more. Therefore, for me these foods aren’t “worth” going off my diet plan.

   See how many foods you can come up with for your list. You might surprise yourself with how many
things you are able to avoid pretty effortlessly already. Work on expanding your list in the future so that you can improve your diet and make healthy eating easier on yourself.

4. Write “troubleshooting” across the top of the next three blank pages of your notebook. Divide each of these pages into two columns. I would like you to come back to these pages and fill in this chart during your 30-day commitment as you strive to live your “mission accomplished statement.” If you make a mistake and deviate from your plan, write the mistake in the first column, and across the page in the next column write the changes you’ll make in order to prevent it from happening again. For example, let’s say that you skip a workout because you would rather watch a certain program on TV. Your troubleshoot might be, “next time I will tape the program and only allow myself to watch it once I’ve completed my workout.”

5. Lots of assignments for this chapter! On the next blank page in your notebook, come up with a list of pleasurable activities other than eating junk food. Eating fattening foods seems to be one of the quickest and easiest solutions we use to give ourselves pleasure, especially in today’s society. However, if you think hard you can probably come up with many other things that might even be more enjoyable for you that don’t have negative consequences like being overweight and unhealthy. Refer back to this list if you find yourself in need of some ideas on how to indulge yourself, and copy some of your favorites into your day planner so you’ll have your options at easy access. This should help you avoid acting on your first pleasure-seeking impulse, which might be to overeat. Remember, overeating is instinctive for many people. This doesn’t have to pose a problem as long as you’re aware of it and you develop the capacity to control that initial impulse. In order to be successful at controlling your initial impulse to overeat, it’s important that you feed your body enough calories and you eat every few hours. If you do those things, you shouldn’t ever feel super-hungry and your body won’t perceive the threat of malnutrition. This makes it much easier both physically and psychologically to bypass your initial impulse to overeat or have junk food.
Strategy 2: Stop Procrastinating

How to increase your productivity and decrease your level of stress

Did you complete the assignment for the “No Fear!” Strategy? If you did, that’s great – you’re right on track for making a lasting change. If you didn’t – what are you waiting for? This System is meant to be an interactive resource. It won’t help you nearly as much if you just read through it without seeing how the information fits into your life via the assignments. Unless you’ve been doing pretty well with your health and fitness already and are just skimming the book for additional tips, please take the time to complete the assignments for each Strategy before you move on to read about another topic. Not only will completing the assignments help you to remember the Strategy much better, but doing them will also help guide you in starting to apply what you’ve learned to your life. The assignments help bridge the gap between theory and application. They will make the information in the Strategies ten times more valuable to you and are the most important part of this program. Did you know that over 95% of self-help books never get acted upon? Don’t be part of that statistic! I want you to succeed, and I would love to receive feedback on how the program works for you. If you’ve been working out and eating well prior to getting your hands on this System, you may not have a need to do all the assignments. If that’s the case for you, just pick and choose the ones that look to be more helpful, but be sure to complete them before moving on. Okay, I’ll step off my soapbox now! Moving on…

Procrastinating has to be one of the most useless actions (or, more accurately, lack of action) there is. It’s important that you realize procrastination is completely different from relaxation. Everyone needs rest and relaxation built into his schedule. Downtime is very important for a person’s health and happiness. When stress levels rise too high, many hormones in your body are adversely affected. Just one of the changes associated with a state of chronically high stress is increased bodyfat storage, in particular the accumulation of fat in the abdominal region. As we all know, excess abdominal fat has negative implications for appearance and for health.

There is a dark side to procrastination beyond the effects on your physique and your physical health, however. When you procrastinate, it is incredibly harmful because not only are you getting nothing accomplished, you aren’t completely relaxing either because in the back of your mind you are thinking about what you should be doing. This means you lose out on your relaxation time too, since you’re spending so much time procrastinating. If you find yourself procrastinating on a regular basis, you’re going to need to formally schedule all the tasks you’d like to complete each day, even the little things.

One of the reasons that personal training in fitness is becoming increasingly popular is that people tend to respect the time reserved for their workout if they have a scheduled appointment. By committing another person’s time as well as your money to the workout, you are much less likely to skip. What you’ve done by setting an appointment is you’ve increased the level of pain you will experience if you blow it off. Some of my clients use a trainer mainly for this reason – they know they’d be at risk to skip their workout otherwise. If you want the accountability but don’t want to use a trainer for every workout, consider meeting with a workout partner every time you train. I also have some clients who email me when they complete their workouts. Just something as simple as keeping your own workout log can help, too. The reward for jumping right in and getting everything done is that you will have more time to rest and relax at the end of the day, free of stress and guilt.

It’s a given that each day is going to pass no matter what. The only way you can fail is if you do nothing. You, and only you, decide whether you get closer to or further from your goal. This is a decision that no coach, mentor, or trainer can make for you. If you do nothing you will simply fall further and further away from your goal of having a healthy, fit body. The reason you go backwards if you do nothing is that your body won’t even stay at status quo if you don’t exercise it. As you age, you experience a loss of body tone unless you exercise consistently. On the other hand, if you exercise regularly, your body usually won’t look its age. People will tend to guess you to be younger and younger than you really are the longer you’ve been exercising consistently.

Bodies require ongoing maintenance and care. The good news is if you spend about three hours a week on your physical fitness, you will reap all the rewards that come with having a fit body. Even by spending just 30 focused minutes a week, you can experience tremendous benefit (see Reference C, “Just How Much Time is Required to Experience the Benefits of Exercise?”) On the other hand, if you neglect
your body’s need for physical activity, you will suffer the consequences – if not now, then surely later. Any step in the right direction, which includes reading this System, is to be commended. There is no perfect time, perfect plan, or perfect effort. Make strides in the right direction at your own pace and you will reap the benefits.

After about 30 days of consistency, your new outlook and behaviors will have become habit and procrastination will be much less of an issue. It will start feeling normal and natural for you to complete your workouts and practice healthy eating. I know it’s a cliché, but every journey really does begin with one step. Every proud owner of a tight, fit body started out with that same step. Get on it now – don’t let any more time pass you by!

**Stop Procrastinating assignment**

1. Make a list of excuses you might come up with to eat poorly or miss a workout on the next two pages in your notebook.

2. On the following page, make two columns. Group the excuses you came up with into two categories: “Legitimate excuses” and “Illegitimate excuses.” Make sure you give some thought as to which group your excuse belongs in, because you will have to stick to your choice if you find yourself trying to use the excuse one of these days. In the future, if you find yourself with a “reason” to miss a workout, you can check to see if your excuse is a valid one in your eyes. For example, let’s say that you group “I have a fever” as a legitimate excuse and “I am behind on household chores” as an illegitimate excuse. If you find yourself trying to use a legitimate excuse not to work out in the future, you still need to get that workout in at some point during your week, but you may permit yourself to reschedule it. If you try to use one of your illegitimate excuses, you are going to need to reassess whether having a fit, healthy body is important to you or not. If you decide that it is, your illegitimate excuse just won’t fly.

   Make sure you tackle your excuses for eating poorly too. Examples include, “It’s a holiday and I’m going to indulge” and, “I’m too tired to make anything tonight, so I think I’ll order pizza.” Which excuses will be legitimate and which will be illegitimate?

   A surefire way to make sure all your workouts get done is to schedule them ahead of time. If you have to miss one due to a legitimate excuse, you may permit yourself to make it up at a future time or date. Strive to maintain your commitment to a certain number of workouts per week or month and a certain level of healthy eating, barring the most extenuating of circumstances.

   If for some reason you miss too much time to make up the workouts, just resume your schedule as normal. In the big picture, as long as you get yourself back on track, missed workouts won’t be a big deal. The ultimate key to fitness is to maintain as much consistency as possible over the long run. The reason I encourage trying to make up missed workouts is so that you won’t feel like you can avoid working out by putting it off. Oftentimes you’ll find that you can fit your workout in after all if you just get creative, since it seems like even more of a pain to figure out how you can fit it in later on.

   It’s amazing how drastically your hierarchy of priorities can change when you create a different set of rules for yourself. Your rules should be based on what you want most in life. I have no interest in forcing you to do your workouts and eat right, nor should you have to force yourself. You just need to understand that certain goals are going to require certain actions to get you there. There is no “free lunch.” If you really do want that great body, you need to do the work to get it. The rules you have for maintaining your health and fitness are simply the vehicles that allow you to get what you want out of life. Workouts and healthy meals are not to be resented. If it really seems that bad, it probably won’t be worth it to you. However, if you decide that you really do want to tone up, get healthier, and feel better, you need to resign yourself to the fact that it’s going to require some effort. Keep in mind, too, that you will have rest days built into your schedule, and you’ll get to enjoy “vacations” from dieting and exercising. These periods of downtime are actually an important part of your overall progress. The “80/20 Rule” in Reference B discusses “cheat” days and “cheat” meals, and there is an entire Strategy devoted to rest (Strategy 29). The danger I’m addressing here and now is missing scheduled workouts. While missing one workout might not seem like much, missing a workout is the number-one precursor to a person giving up on a program. One missed session turns into two, two into three, and so on. Even if you don’t allow yourself to slide downhill, you still don’t want to miss any workouts. You’ll only be falling behind in your journey toward your ultimate goal, and perhaps more importantly, you’ll stop taking your goals so seriously. This just isn’t the right attitude to have when you claim to be determined to achieve something.
Strategy 3: Talking “up”

How to use positive self-talk to promote success

Everything will become easier for you once you reach the understanding that you create your own reality. You will find that more positive things come into your life almost effortlessly when you utilize positive self-talk. The thoughts and images that fill your mind include both what’s real and what’s imaginary, and your mind can’t tell the difference – all it knows are the thoughts and images that are in your head. You can use this lack of differentiation between the real and the imaginary to your advantage. To capitalize on this phenomenon, always be thinking about what you want to have happen. Your mind will interpret this thought as if it’s already come true.

Your mind will focus most on the concepts that dominate your thoughts. Do you see, then, why it’s better to think, “I am getting stronger every day” rather than, “I am very weak?” Your mind will focus on the main idea of a thought (for the previous example, the main idea is “stronger every day” and “very weak,” respectively). That’s one reason why it’s better to think positive thoughts. Also, realize that your mind tends to focus on the main idea so intensely that it sometimes misses qualifier words like “don’t.” Therefore, it’s better to think “I workout 3 times a week” than it is to think, “I don’t skip my workouts.” Your brain will tend to focus on the main idea, which is “workout 3 times a week” or “skip my workouts” in that example. Which would you rather have happen?

If you need proof of just how powerful your mind can be, think back to a time when you felt petrified of something that wasn’t actually right there in front of you at the moment. When you were a child, were you ever afraid of monsters that you imagined might be there, even though you couldn’t see them at the time? Your brain sent signals to your body that there was something to be afraid of, in spite of the fact that you couldn’t actually see anything amiss. What about a time when you were walking alone in an unfamiliar place? Did you ever feel afraid even though there was no sign of immediate danger? If this has happened to you, your brain perceived the threat that you imagined as reality, and this became manifest in your body. In this type of situation, your breathing might have become shallow, your heart might have started beating faster, and you might have developed goose bumps, all because of something you imagined!

The moral of the story is to keep your thoughts positive, rather than let your mind focus on what you shouldn’t do. Better yet, create your own reality and turn an “I should do” into an “I do.” You greatly improve your chances for success when you maintain a positive mindset. You can actually psyche yourself out when you focus on the negative by thinking about all the bad things that could happen.

I know from participating in competitive gymnastics that this can happen very easily. I remember certain instances when I told myself “I can’t” and, sure enough, it came true. Many times it took my coach telling me he believed in me before I’d start planting those positive ideas into my head. I didn’t learn every move I wanted to in my career, but the tougher ones that I learned came as a result of positive thinking. This example also reinforces a message from the “No Fear!” Strategy. Sometimes you get the best results when you place blind faith in a mentor who knows what’s best for you, even if what that mentor recommends feels uncomfortable or unnatural at first.

It might feel funny to start telling yourself, “I am losing weight every day” if you know it’s not true yet. Keep at it anyway, because this type of self-talk will unleash mental power that you might not even know you had. Your experience will be similar to what I went through when I had the ability to do a gymnastics skill but I just wasn’t confident enough until my coach insisted that I could. You have so much untapped power inside, and using these techniques will help you to release it. You can develop a ton of confidence in yourself simply by using positive self-talk. This confidence will give you the strength to maximize your abilities, enabling you to put your best effort forth in everything you do.
Talking “up” assignment

1. On the next page in your notebook, I’d like you to list some positive phrases relating to your goals. Make sure they’re stated in the affirmative. For example:
   a. “I choose fruit when I want a sweet.”
   b. “I commit to working out for at least 10 minutes no matter what.”
   (Many times you will feel a surge of energy and motivation and want to continue! But even if you don’t, at least you did something. You got closer to your goal).
   c. “I take my multivitamin every morning with breakfast.”
   (Or even, “I eat breakfast.” You know who you are!)

2. Refer to this page often. You might get some ideas for your goals by referring back to section II of this book, “The 7 Keys to Raising Your Metabolism for Life.” Come up with your own ideas that are best suited to your needs, in particular ones that can help you reverse the poisonous effects of negative thinking.

   To expand your list, consider any statements that you find running though your head, even if they are negative. Give the negative ones a positive spin and write it down. For instance, if you find yourself thinking, “I can't seem to stay away from those cookies – I’m getting so fat!” turn that thought into, “I reach for fruits, vegetables, and yogurt when I need a snack. I am getting thinner every day.” I know that might sound corny to you, but you will thank me for the suggestion when you achieve all your goals.

   Repetition is the only way you’re going to cement these thoughts into your head. You might want to transfer the positive statements from your notebook onto index cards so you’ll have them at easy access. Keep the cards in a handy place so you can flip through them when you have a minute. At the very least, keep them by your bed and go through them each night before going to sleep. They will stick in your memory better when you read them at that time. Or, jot them down in your day planner so that every time you open it you can glance at them. This will help to reinforce your positive mindset.

Hopefully you have received some helpful information through this mini e-book! Here is remainder of the table of contents for the full-length “Mind Over Fatter.” If you believe the information will help you, please consider purchasing the e-book for $15, or the book for $19.95.

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Strategy 5. Applying discipline and creating S.M.A.R.T. Goals
How goal-mapping ensures your success

Strategy 6. Developing a plan of action
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