

By making 10 simple adjustments to your everyday approach to nutrition and training, extreme diets and deprivation can be things of the past. You won't be living off pizza, but some simple tweaks can add up to a lifestyle change that helps you strip away fat and keep it off for years to come

1) GIVE YOUR CARBS COMPANY

>> As long as you're training hard and not going overboard in the calorie department, there's nothing wrong with consuming carbs. Carbs consumed alone, without an accompanying protein source, rapidly digest into glucose. This triggers a rise in insulin, stoking the appetite and slowing the fat-burning process. Research shows that protein helps curb that rapid conversion, so it should accompany carbs at all of your meals, small or large.

2) DON'T EAT CARBS AND SNOOZE

When you sleep, you burn less fuel so eating carbs before bedtime can cause a fat-storage increase. Better to go to bed with just a small protein meal. And don't eat carbs within the three hours before bedtime: Snoozing on a stomach full of carbs can also interfere with the release of growth hormone (GH), an important factor in building muscle and burning fat. Stick with small portions (20-30 grams) of lean proteins, such as low-fat cottage cheese or a casein protein shake.

3) HYDRATE TO LOOK GREAT

>> Some research shows mildly dehydrated individuals demonstrate up to a 2% decline in metabolism. That may not sound like much, but in the long run it can mean the difference between looking like a Muscle & Fitness cover model and a walking piñata. In fact, a 2003 study from The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism found that drinking half a liter of water raised metabolism by 30%. The body is comprised of about 70% water, making H₂O consumption key to normal body functions and metabolic processes. It also helps promote a feeling of satiety, keeping your finger off the speed dial to your local pizzeria between meals. It's also common for people to mistake thirst for hunger, which can lead you to look for more food rather than pouring fluids down your gullet. Try to drink a half-liter of water several times a day between meals. The trips to the water closet will seem worth it when you're ripped.

4) BE A FAT-SWAPPER

>> Fats are important for health, but they are calorie dense: 9 calories per gram of fat as opposed to 4 calories per gram of carbs and protein. If you really want to get shredded, you need to limit them to some degree - particularly the saturated fats found in beef and dairy. Saturated fats are essential for keeping testosterone levels up, but they also get stored preferentially as bodyfat. Limit your beef intake to one serving daily and eat more fowl and fish. Consuming more monounsaturated fats (from nuts, olive oil, avocados) and polyunsaturated fats (fatty fish) is a good idea because they're preferentially burned for fuel, not stored as fat. Keep total fat intake to 20% or less of your total daily calories.

5) BREAK THE FAST

>> Breakfast, more than any other meal, sets the metabolic pace for the day. It's the meal that's least likely to be stored as bodyfat, actually supports metabolism and helps you control your appetite throughout the day. Skimp here and chances are you'll be starving by mid-afternoon, making you far more likely to make a poor food choice (Burger King, anyone?). So go ahead and have an omelet loaded with low-fat or fat-free cheese and grilled veggies. A study out of Saint Louis University (St. Louis) from a 2005 Journal of the American College of Nutrition found that those who ate eggs for breakfast consumed fewer calories throughout the day. Hell, you can even splurge on some whole-grain pancakes - go light on the syrup - or opt for a small whole-grain bagel and a banana to go with your eggs.

6) TRAIN MORE OFTEN

>> Of course, recovery is key when it comes to muscle growth. If you split up your training enough, however, you could end up with six or seven lower-volume, metabolism-boosting trips to the gym per week. When you train, your metabolism burns hotter for a few hours afterward. Training six days a week with shorter workouts - as opposed to three longer sessions when you train 2-3 bodyparts - you'll experience a greater overall metabolic increase. Plus, training fewer bodyparts in a single session helps prevent your body from becoming run-down and overtrained.

The other benefit to more frequent training: glucose metabolism. When you train daily, you coax the body's glucose transport system to more readily take excess glucose from unused carbs and store them as muscle glycogen rather than bodyfat. Try this higher-frequency split:

Day Bodyparts Trained

- 1 Chest, abs
- 2 Back
- 3 Legs, calves, abs
- 4 Shoulders, traps
- 5 Triceps, abs
- 6 Biceps, forearms
- 7 Rest

7) FOLLOW THE ½ RULE

>> Take half the portion of carbs you typically eat and mix it into 1-2 cups of low-calorie veggies, such as green beans, mushrooms, broccoli, cauliflower, onions, bell peppers or lettuce. The low-cal veggies replace the higher calorie value in your complex carbs such as rice, potatoes or pasta, filling you up faster and keeping you from having seconds. You have nearly effortlessly saved yourself hundreds of calories over the course of the week.

8) DRINK YOUR FIBER

>> Sugar-free fiber drink ad campaigns often target the elderly to help "keep them regular." But the idea is good for more than just those collecting Social Security - fiber also keeps you leaner, Mr. Musclehead. Fiber acts like a sponge, attracting water in the stomach, and a greater volume of water in the gut increases the feeling of being full. Fiber also stimulates glucose receptors on muscle cells, which indirectly lowers insulin levels. Research has shown insulin to be a major appetite stimulant, so getting that hormone under control can provide the freedom you need to eat less without feeling hungry and deprived. A simple daily sugar-free fiber drink before your bedtime protein meal (see Rule No. 2) will do the trick. The perk? They actually taste pretty good.

9) COMPARE YOURSELF TO . . . YOURSELF

>> Nothing's more motivating than staring at a less-than-flattering photo of yourself in your Skivvies, belly creeping over your waistline. That's what I look like? Be your own "before" photo. Every 7-10 days, have a trusted and nonjudgmental friend or significant other take a snapshot of you standing or flexing in your unmentionables. Post it where only you can see it each day, lest you become the main topic around your office watercooler. If you're making good gains, this photo will keep you on the path to success, but if you're cheating on your diet and not eating well, it will serve as a reminder that you have to correct your rudder and change course, if you expect to change your build.

10) SPLURGE (A LITTLE)

>> If - and this is a big if - you're hitting the mark with most of the aforementioned lifestyle choices listed here, you should work a reward plan into the picture. The reward in this case is to treat yourself once a week by dining out and eating whatever you want - within reason. No, you can't eat 10 chili dogs, but you can go out and order from a restaurant menu and split a dessert with your guest. Part of staying in shape involves giving your mind a break, only to get right back to healthy eating after that meal. It also does far less damage than you might think. When one - not 10 - higher-calorie meal is averaged in over the course of a week, it isn't enough to do any real damage to your waistline. M&F

JUST ADD EXERCISE

>> If the nutritional adjustments come easy to you, try observing these four tips to make the most out of your fight on fat in the gym

1) Turn Down the Volume

Sure, doing more exercises might burn more calories, but looking at the bigger picture, the name of the game is anabolism (i.e., muscle growth). Nothing builds mass like training hard and getting adequate rest, but performing an excessive number of sets wears the body down, inhibiting anabolism and slowing metabolism. Better to err on the "less is more" side of the argument and stick with basic, heavy exercises in the 6-12-rep range than to institute marathon training sessions that can hinder your gains in muscle and losses in bodyfat.

2) Don't Wait for Weights

If you hit the treadmill before the squat rack, you fiddle with the maximal growth hormone release associated with training. Research shows that when you do weights first and cardio last, GH levels are higher. This is critical because GH not only boosts muscle growth but fat-burning as well. Plus, performing cardio after weightlifting can result in greater fat-burning because your body is carb-depleted.

3) Eat Light to Lift Big

The meal you chow down 30-60 minutes before training doesn't power the workout alone. It's the combination of that meal and stored carbohydrates (muscle glycogen) that gets you through your heavy lifts. If you eat a lot of food - particularly of the carbohydrate variety - you inhibit the breakdown of bodyfat to some degree. Taking a more moderate approach and eating only a small snack of 20 grams of protein and 20-40 grams of carbs 30-60 minutes before training is more beneficial. Save the big meal for after training; the body will put that food to work immediately to restart the growth process.

4) Tired? Just Skip It

Are you dead tired and contemplating skipping the gym to hit the couch after work? Then do exactly that. When you train fatigued, you trigger the release of stress hormones that actually destroy muscle. Keep in mind, muscle is the main driver of metabolism and allows you to look and stay lean. If you do anything to kill off muscle tissue, you're doing nothing to help yourself. If you're well rested, the body responds far better to your workout than if you're exhausted. Well-rested muscles are more adept at taking on more size and density, which parlays directly into a better metabolism.