

9 Ways to Burn Fat

Easy steps you can take

By Robyn Moreno

Everyone's metabolism naturally slows down with age. At 40, you could be burning 100 to 300 fewer calories a day than you did at 30, says Pamela M. Peeke, M.D., author of *Body for Life for Women* and assistant professor of medicine at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. That can translate into a 10-25-pound weight gain in a year. But you can counteract that slowdown and boost your body's fat-burning capabilities by making just a few tweaks to your daily routine. The following strategies will help you bust out of a weight-loss plateau and burn even more fat.

Take five

Do five minutes of exercise each morning. We all have a metabolic thermostat, called the metastat, that can be turned up or down, and morning is the best time to activate it. Each day, your metastat is waiting for signals to rev up, so the more signals you can send it, the better. Your best bet is a light, full-body activity like walking or push-ups.

Fuel up in the morning

Numerous studies have found that regular breakfast eaters are often leaner than breakfast skippers. "Your metabolism naturally slows at night, but you can jump-start it in the morning by eating breakfast," says Tammy Lakatos Shames, R.D., C.D.N., co-author of *Fire Up Your Metabolism*. And because both your activity level and metabolism decrease later in the day, it's a good idea to make breakfast or lunch your largest meal.

Fill up on good grains

Whole grains such as brown rice, wheat germ, dark bread, whole-grain cereal, oatmeal and bran leave you feeling full because they take longer to digest than simple carbohydrates. In a study from *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School evaluated the dietary intake of more than 74,000 women for 12 years. Overall, women who regularly ate the most whole-grain foods — about 1.5 servings a day — gained less weight than women who ate the least.

Pump yourself up

Muscle burns more calories than fat does, and decreased muscle mass can be one of the main reasons metabolism slows. Disuse can cause women to drop as much as 10 pounds of muscle between the ages of 30 and 50. Losing that much muscle means you'll burn 350 to 500 fewer calories a day. To build and maintain muscle mass, aim for two to three strength-training workouts a week. If you don't belong to a gym, try push-ups, squats, abdominal crunches and tricep dips off a chair.

Power on with protein

Add a little high-quality, lowfat protein, such as chicken, fish and egg whites, to your meals, and you'll help your body burn fat faster. "Because protein requires more energy to digest, it speeds up your metabolism, and protein is necessary to ensure against loss of muscle tissue," says Michael Thurmond, author of 6 Day Body Makeover.

Get your vitamin "I"

That's "I" for intensity. You love to walk, but if that usually means strolling along at a snail's pace, your waistline will pay little attention. Instead, put intensity, or "vitamin I," into your stride. Pick up your pace so you're walking at 4 mph, or one mile per 15 minutes. Once you build up your cardiovascular fitness level, you can even alternate between walking and jogging. The key is to get your heart rate up and keep your workouts challenging.

Say yes to yogurt

In a recent study from the International Journal of Obesity, women who ate three daily servings of lowfat yogurt lost 60 percent more fat than women who didn't. In another study, participants who ate three daily servings of dairy lost more than twice as much fat as those who ate less than that. "Calcium-rich diets reduce fat-producing enzymes and increase enzymes that break down fat," says Michael B. Zemel, Ph.D., lead author of both studies and director of the Nutrition Institute at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Eat three servings of lowfat dairy a day, like milk, yogurt and hard cheeses (Gouda, Cheddar and Monterey Jack).

Get active after eating

Your body's metabolic rate increases 10 percent after eating, and just a few minutes of activity could double that boost for up to three hours. Within 15 to 30 minutes of eating a snack or meal, do five or 10 minutes of light activity. Take the dog for a walk, climb stairs in your house or do some basic strength exercises.

Sip green tea

You might love your lattes, but if you switch to green tea, not only will you get a healthy dose of disease-fighting compounds, you'll also cut body fat. In a study from The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, people who drank a bottle of tea fortified with green tea extract every day for three months lost more body fat than people who drank black tea. Researchers at a health care lab in Tokyo believe disease-fighting antioxidants called catechins in green tea may help decrease body fat.