title: Calorie Counting and Why It Doesn’t Work

description: The article explains why calorie counting doesn’t work for weight loss and describes an alternative method.

H1:   Low-carb or low-calorie diet: which one is better?

Modern society is divided into two groups: some insist that weight loss depends on the number of calories spent and consumed. Others claim that a nutrient-dense whole-food diet contributes to weight loss. There is no consensus on this subject, and in this article, we will try to delve into this topic.

*Definition of the term*

First of all, the calories we can see on the package are kilocalories, which have been shortened for convenience to Calories with a capital C. Calorie is the amount of energy needed to heat one liter of water one degree Celsius. The number of calories contained in food can be calculated by the following macronutrients:

* 1 gram of carbohydrates – 4 Calories;
* 1 gram of fat – 9 Calories;
* 1 gram of protein – 4 Calories;
* 1 gram of alcohol – 7 Calories;

However, it is worth remembering that these figures are approximate since a certain amount of calories is also necessary for the breakdown of different macronutrients. It also depends on the form of protein, fat, or carbohydrate consumed.

You may have heard of «3500 calorie rule», which states that you need to spend 3500 Calories in order to lose 1 pound of fat. This figure is based on some calculations: 1 pound or 454 grams of fat, according to the data above, contains 4086 Calories. The figure is reduced to 3,500 because human fat is not 100% fat.

*Calories intake and burning*

If you accept this rule, the need for accurate calculation of calories consumed becomes obvious. As mentioned above, Calorie calculations for macronutrients are approximate. Counting becomes even more difficult because of the variety of food we consume: even pieces of meat from cows that have different diets contain different amounts of macronutrients.

If we accept that we need to consume 3500 extra Calories to gain 1 extra pound of fat, this means that we need to consume only 38.88 extra Calories with each meal for one month. Such exact calculations are simply not possible due to a large number of assumptions and rounding.

The human body consumes calories with:

* Resting metabolism rate;
* Exercise and other activities;
* Heat generation;

The resting metabolic rate is the energy the body needs to maintain its normal functions. It makes up most of the energy expended by the body and can increase or decrease under the influence of various factors: insufficient or excess amount of calories, stress, intense training.

Also, the influence of the thermal effect of food is great. TEF is the percentage of Calories that the body spends on the breakdown of food. So, for protein it is 20-35 percent, while for carbohydrates and fat – 5-10. This means that consuming more protein at the same calorie content, fewer calories will be used for energy or excess fat.

Exercise is the smallest fraction of calorie expenditure. The amount of calories burned in this case is negligible. However, according to many studies, a person is more likely to have a craving for sweets or consume more calories after intense training. Exercises and training can be effectively used to stimulate muscle growth, improve coordination, build body shape, but they are useless to burn calories.

Thus, an accurate calculation of the calories we spend, as well as the calories we consume, is not possible.

*Sources of energy for our body*

The human body uses two sources of energy - these are carbohydrates and fat, which are burned in fatty acids and glucose. Carbohydrates are called fast energy, as the body starts to burn them immediately after consumption. If the body burns carbohydrates, it does not burn fat.

Most cases of slowing metabolic rate are recorded by individuals who follow high in carbohydrates and low in protein diet. Whether an organism feels a shortage of food does not depend on the number of calories, but on the type of food consumed. Thus, an overweight person feels hunger because he cannot gain access to fat stores due to carbohydrates consumed.

*Typical solution and why it is not effective?*

The average person, having the target of losing excess weight, most often resorts to a low-fat or low in calories diet. In this case, focusing on enjoyment, a person will consume fruits, cereal, low-calorie juices and snacks, low-fat yogurt.

By consuming this food, a person keeps insulin levels high in the blood; the body does not have access to fat stores. When insulin levels drop, a person experiences a feeling of hunger. The body reacts to this by lowering the level of metabolism and thus reducing the number of calories burned. As a result, even with a very low-calorie meal, the weight decreases very slowly, the person feels hunger, and he does not achieve the desired result.

*Alternative solution*

The second way to lose weight is to keep a low-carb diet by consuming non-starchy vegetables, protein, and healthy fats. The intake of fats and proteins practically does not affect the level of insulin. The level of insulin in the blood does not increase much as the body does not receive many carbohydrates, and the body has access to fat stores and burns them even with a large number of calories consumed.

This diet shows greater efficiency compared to a low-calorie diet when the body cannot burn fat, which leads to constant hunger and loss of muscle mass. The problem is that people who want to lose weight pay attention to the number of calories and not to the carbohydrates consumed.

*Conclusion*

Thousands of years ago, mankind did not have the kind of diet that we get now. People consumed animals, plants, seeds, and fruits. Today, most of the products that you can buy in the store are modified starch and carbohydrates. Before you buy any product, you need to ask the question «How will this affect my insulin level?». By avoiding a strong increase in insulin level we can achieve results in losing and maintaining the desired weight. It is worth noting that the energy balance is also affected by sleep, stress, exercise, and so on. However, if you want to find the simplest solution, pay attention to carbohydrates consumed, not calories.