

Basic Training For Boomer Divas

Nutrition Guidelines for Fat Loss

Food isn't the enemy in a fat loss program. It's the solution. I often joke with my one-on-one clients that they can work out with me 3 times per week, but what they do the other 163 hours per week can make or break their success. Quite frankly, you can't out-exercise a poor diet, so let's clean up your nutrition a bit!

Maintaining a lean body really is all about lifestyle. What you eat on one particular day or at one particular meal isn't really an issue, it's what you do on a *regular basis* that will (literally!) shape the way you look.

So, let's look at the basics. With regard to your nutrition, what do you need to DO to lose body fat? I'll list below six basic tenets I'd like you to follow, and then I'll go into more detail on each one afterwards:

- 1- Eat 5-6 small meals per day
- 2- Limit your consumption of processed food and sugary treats
- 3- Eat unlimited amounts of vegetables and 2-3 fruits per day
- 4- Drink more water and limit caloric drinks (soda, smoothies, coffee drinks)
- 5- Eat lean protein throughout the day
- 6- Save starchy foods (e.g., bread, pasta, corn, rice) for after a workout

Meal frequency

This is a biggie. The first thing many women do when they decide to lose weight is to skip meals or eat a *really* low calorie diet. Wrong on both counts. Not eating frequently enough or eating too few calories will hurt your progress. Sure, in order to lose fat you may need to eat fewer calories than you do now (keeping a food journal will help you here), but starving yourself or skipping meals is setting yourself up for failure.

When you skip meals or go long periods of time between meals, your body thinks you are experiencing a famine. It will lower its metabolic rate in order to "preserve" itself. Not knowing when it will receive more calories (energy), your brain sends signals to your body to slow down its metabolism. It is receiving less energy, so it wants to burn less energy.

When you drastically cut your calories, what eventually happens? You gorge yourself with food because you're SO hungry. This sets up a vicious cycle of hunger and over feeding. So let's stop that nonsense, shall we? The worst thing about eating too few calories is that you may lose muscle. Your muscles are like engines, they consume calories for fuel all day long. Do you really want to lose these workhorses and decrease your metabolic rate? I didn't think so.

You need to eat--and eat regularly--in order to keep your metabolism stoked, stabilize your blood sugar and keep yourself feeling good. Eating small meals and snacks more frequently, every 3 to 3.5 hours, provides your body with a regular supply of fuel it needs.

Limit processed foods and sugary foods

This is a tough one. We all reach for convenient, easily prepared and easily eaten food. Few of us prepare the majority of our own meals. I love a sweet treat, so I'd be hypocritical if I told you to avoid all processed foods and sugary sweets. However, I am going to suggest you limit them to a few times a week instead of daily.

What's a processed food? Think of the muffins, scones, and pastries at coffee shops we sometime pick up for a quick breakfast. Then there are the burgers, fries, potato chips, or frozen entrees some folks eat for lunch or dinner. And let's not forget the cakes, cookies and candy we snack on during the day. They're usually high calories, often high sugar or fat, low in fiber and low in nutrition overall.

Eat your fruits and veggies

Yes, I know you *know* this, but most of you aren't doing it! An easy way to increase your veggie intake is to use veggies and fruit for snacks. Throw a handful of berries in your yogurt or your high fiber cereal. Eliminate the side of rice or pasta at dinner and replace it with steamed or roasted veggies. You'll get tons of vitamins, minerals and filling fiber when you add more veggies and fruits to your diet.

Drink more water and avoid drinking your calories

This is the first thing I work on with my clients who want to lose weight, especially those that don't have a lot of weight to lose. It's such an easy fix. Just this one little tweak—more water and fewer calorie filled fluids—can make a drastic change in your waistline! Make sure to include everything you drink in your food journal. Some women are surprised that their liquid calories add up to more than 600 calories in one day.

One reason that calories from liquids can wreak havoc with a fat loss program is that calories from liquids don't seem to make us feel full like calories from solid food, so it's easy to consume a lot of calories in liquid form and have no idea you've done so.

I'm a strong supporter of calcium in the diet, so if you drink non-fat or 1% milk, keep it in your program. Just make sure you measure your milk servings so that you can log your calories accordingly, and stick to one or two 8 oz. servings a day.

Eat lean protein

Eating a little protein at each meal or snack helps to keep you feeling fuller longer and also slows down the absorption of the food you eat, thereby minimizing large fluctuations in your blood sugar. I'll give examples of good sources of protein a little later in this article.

Save starchy foods breakfast or for after workouts

After you exercise, your muscles have been depleted of stored carbohydrates (glycogen), so this is a great time to re-stock your muscles with energy! A small whole wheat bagel, a bowl of high fiber cereal or a whole grain waffle can be a great breakfast or after- workout meal when combined with a little protein.

I don't really believe there are "bad" carbs and "good" carbs. As a population, I think we eat *too many* starchy carbs (rice, pasta, potatoes), but I don't think they're inherently bad.

Usually it's the serving size or what you put on the item (like Alfredo sauce or full fat sour cream!) that makes the choice an unhealthy one.

Focus on fruits and veggies for your carbohydrate sources, and when you do choose to eat grain based or starchy foods, simply stick with reasonable portions, and opt for whole grain products whenever possible. Carbohydrates are the energy source we use to move and get through the day. Don't be afraid of them.

Recommended foods

Protein

Chicken breast
Turkey
Tuna
Salmon
Tilapia
Tofu
Eggs/egg whites
Lean ground sirloin
Flank steak
Protein powder
Cottage cheese
Low fat cheese

Starches

Oatmeal
Whole wheat bread
Oat bran
Barley
Whole wheat tortilla
Quinoa
Summer Squash
Yams/sweet potatoes
Corn tortilla
High fiber cereal
Brown rice

Vegetables/Legumes

Spinach
Broccoli
Asparagus
Tomatoes
Hummus
Romaine Lettuce
Red/green peppers
Cauliflower
Onions
Lentils
Beans

Fruits

Apple
Pear
Blueberry
Strawberry
Raspberry
Peach
Orange
Tangerine
Grapes
Cherries

Fats/Oils

Olive oil
Walnuts
Almonds
Flaxseed oil
Avocado
Smart Balance

Other good-for-you foods

Peanut butter
Yogurt
Feta cheese
Low fat string cheese

This is certainly not an exhaustive list of good-for-you foods, but it's a good start on stocking a healthy kitchen.

“Dieting” (as I defined in my video) and deprivation can become a vicious circle. What's worse, they will make you fatter and less lean over time. Let's stop the dieting cycle and move you to a “working on a healthier eating style” cycle. It's a lot easier to live with!

Try changing just one thing each week. Work on making tomorrow just a little bit better than yesterday. Small changes add up to big results over time. The wonderful thing is, these small changes over time have a MUCH greater chance of becoming part of your lifestyle than the next weird diet craze does. Therefore, your chances of losing body fat and KEEPING IT OFF are much more likely when you take a sensible lifestyle approach.

Becky Williamson, M.S., is a Personal Fitness Trainer and Baby Boomer Fitness Expert based in San Jose, California. She is the creator of the "Fit and Fabulous FitCamp for Women over 40" in San Jose, and she blogs about all things "health and fitness" at her boomer fitness blog for women at <http://www.beckywilliamson.com>