

10 Tips to Cut Calories

by [Len Kravitz, PhD](#)

For the first time, [overeating](#) is a larger problem than starvation among the world's overall population (Buchanan & Sheffield 2017). Losing weight—and, perhaps more importantly, not regaining it—is a challenge facing millions of people worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), global obesity rates have nearly tripled since 1975. Further, 1.9 billion adults (18 years and older) were overweight in 2016. Of those people, more than 650 million were obese (WHO 2017). In 2013, the American Medical Association House of Delegates declared obesity a “disease” requiring treatment because of the multiple medical, functional, and psychological complications associated with it.

There are numerous “remedies” for being overweight or obese. People buy the newest weight loss books, cut out sugar, eat low-fat and/or low-carb diets, and try the latest quick-fix weight loss products or programs. Yet none of these “solutions” has resolved the [obesity](#) epidemic.

This article presents an energy balance update and a contemporary understanding of why diets don't work and why people are missing the mark. Fitness professionals can use the 50 easy-to-implement calorie-cutting ideas presented, along with information about the evidence-based small-steps approach, to help clients stick to a personalized, realistic, and long-lasting [healthy eating](#) plan.

Why Do Diets Fail?

[Dieting](#) can be defined as a deliberate attempt to restrict food consumption and achieve (or maintain) a desired body weight (Buchanan & Sheffield 2017). The inherent message in many diet plans is that certain foods or food groups are making us fat and so we must largely or completely avoid them. Although numerous plans claim to be medically sound, the associated long-term, health-related benefits are incomplete, and the restrictive nature of these plans makes them difficult to follow and maintain. However, the diet industry continues to be focused on *which foods* we should eat. While this appears to be a successful sales and marketing approach, it doesn't educate people about the negative effects of consuming *large quantities* of foods (and sugary drinks), a primary factor in ongoing global [weight gain](#). There's no way of getting around it—a person who eats and drinks too much is going to gain weight, and a person who seeks to lose weight must limit calorie intake.

The Small-Changes Approach to Combating Obesity

The small-changes approach was originally designed to support small lifestyle changes and prevent gradual weight gain (Hill 2009). It has evolved to be a wide-ranging strategy that incorporates minor changes in diet and [physical activity](#) to combat overweight and obesity. The concept is that small changes, such as cutting calories or making food

substitutions, are much easier to implement and maintain than many traditional dietary interventions.

Four Reasons Why the Small-Changes Strategy May Work

A 17-member task force from the American Society for Nutrition, the Institute of Food Technologists, and the International Food Information Council evaluated the efficacy of the small-changes obesity intervention. According to Hill, there are four major reasons why this approach may succeed:

1. Small changes are more realistic to achieve and maintain than large ones.
2. Even small changes influence body weight regulation.
3. Small, successful lifestyle changes improve self-efficacy.
4. The small-changes approach may be applied to environmental forces.

50 Ways to Cut Calories

The following 50 tips on cutting calories fall into eight categories:

Control Over Tempting Sensation Habits

1. Control triggers. For some people, certain foods trigger overeating. Be aware of these foods and find ways to avoid them by substituting satisfying, non-triggering foods.
2. Plan for parties. Before attending social events, dinner parties, or catered occasions where there will be rich, high-calorie foods, eat a light protein-based snack (i.e., bean salad or yogurt).
3. Find a balance with favorite foods. It's common to [overindulge](#) on favorite foods. Identify yours and commit to enjoying them, but don't overindulge.
4. Be aware of breakfast starch overload. Many people treat themselves to a special bagel for breakfast, along with cream cheese, coffee, and juice. Since a bagel today is equivalent to about five slices of bread, try a breakfast of egg whites, fruit, and a quarter bagel instead.
5. Combat protein overload at dinner. Restaurants regularly entice customers with irresistible steak, seafood, and chicken specials. Split a meal with a friend to cut the colossal protein calorie overload. Perhaps start the meal with a low-fat salad and eat plenty of vegetables.

Simple Substitutions

6. Switch from a 3-ounce serving of meat to the equivalent of a meat alternative, such as lentils.

7. Switch from a serving of bread to a serving of rice cakes (about five rice cakes).
8. Switch from a 6-ounce glass of orange juice to a cup of cantaloupe.
9. Switch from a 1.5-ounce serving of cheese to an 8-ounce yogurt.
10. Switch from a half-cup of dried fruit to a cup of berries.

For the rest of the 50 tips, please see [“50 Ways to Cut Calories”](#) in the online IDEA Library or in the January 2018 print edition of *Fitness Journal*. [IDEA Fit Tips, Volume 16, Issue 2](#)

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