

BALANCING ACT

It's not one of the 5 'Cs' anyone might hanker after but it pervades every strata of society and every ounce of our being. Ong Li Jiuen, dietitian, Changi General Hospital, zooms in on our love-hate relationship with the Big C – Calories.

The high economic and social costs of diabetes and its rising prevalence make a compelling case for its prevention. Studies (1,2) have shown that more than 50% reduction in progression of Impaired Glucose Tolerance (IGT) to type 2 diabetes can be still be achieved, apart from treatment with medications, by lifestyle changes with moderate exercise and diet.

In this article, we will focus on the dietary aspects of keeping the weight off to prevent or manage diabetes.

DOWN WITH THE CALORIES

Of all the diet strategies out there, the only way to keep the weight off still boils down to the good old calorie. Fad diets may promise you that counting carbohydrates or eating a mountain of grapefruit is key to weight loss, but when it comes to weight control, it is the calories that count.

Your body has a constant demand for energy and uses the calories from food to keep you functioning. Calories are the energy in foods. Energy from calories fuels your every action, very much like what petrol does for a car.

Carbohydrates, fats and proteins contain calories and, thus, are the main energy sources for your body.

1 g carbohydrate/ protein= 4 kcal

1 g fat = 9kcal

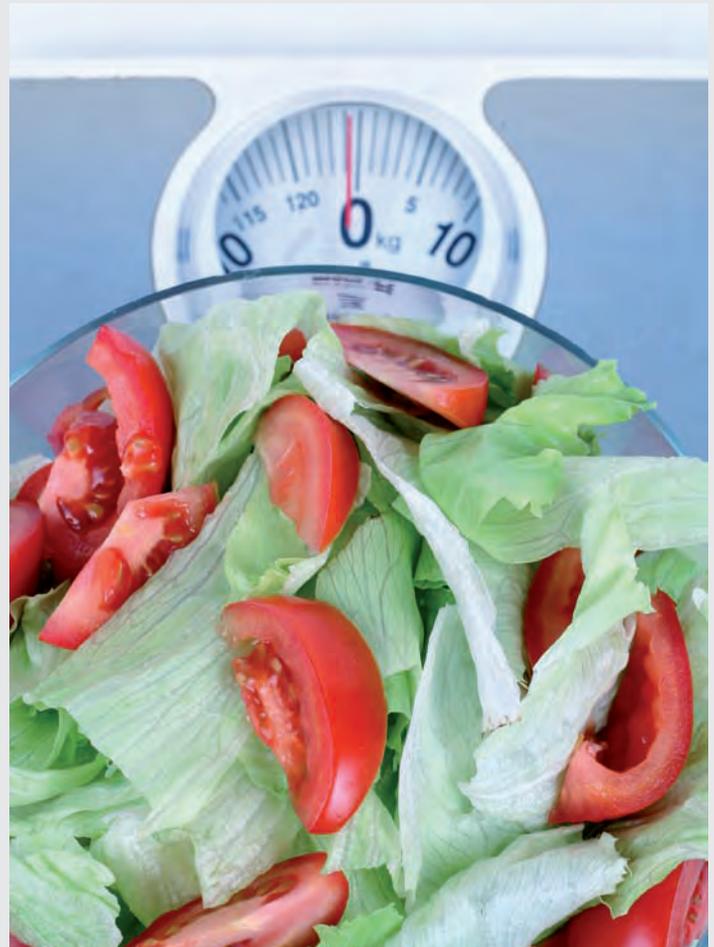
1g alcohol= 7kcal

Regardless of where they come from, the calories you eat are either converted to physical energy or stored within your body as fat. You can reduce your calorie intake so that your body will draw on the reserves for energy, or increase your physical activity so that you will burn more calories. Otherwise, these calories will remain within your body as fat.

KEEP THE BALANCE

If you eat more calories than you burn, you gain weight. 3,500 calories equals about 0.5kg of fat. You need to burn 3,500 calories more than you take in to lose 0.5kg. So, if you cut 500 calories from your typical diet each day, you would lose approximately 0.5kg a week (500 calories x 7 days = 3,500 calories).

Cutting calories does not have to be difficult. In fact, it might be as simple as forgoing one extra food item a day, swapping foods or trimming serving sizes. The number of calories you save is likely to translate into kilos lost.



Just where do you start? Right here and now:

1. Cut High-Calorie Foods

Skipping one or two high-calorie items that you might have otherwise eaten is a good place to start when cutting calories. For example, you could skip your bowl of sweet dessert or ice cream you always have after dinner. Be mindful of what you eat and drink each day and identify excess calories from foods you eat that can be cut out.

2. Choose Lower Calorie Foods

Replace foods that are high in calories with ones that are lower in calories. For example, drink low fat milk instead of full cream milk and plain water or diet beverages instead of regular soft drinks.

Have an extra serving of vegetables at dinner instead of an extra serving of meat. You can try snacking on sliced fresh fruit instead of chips. You might find that these substitutions are easy to make and the number of saved calories quickly adds up.

3. Reduce Portion Sizes

The amount of food you eat affects how many calories you are getting: twice the amount of food means twice the number of calories.

To reduce how much food you eat, and therefore how many calories you consume, try these tips:

- * Take smaller portions at the beginning of a meal. Take slightly less than what you think you'll eat. You can always have seconds, if necessary.
- * See what you eat. Eating directly from a container gives you no sense of how much you're eating. Seeing food on a plate or in a bowl keeps you aware of how much you are eating. Consider measuring your food with a measuring cup or scale to see how much you are actually eating.
- * Check food labels. Be sure to check food labels for the serving size and number of calories per serving. You may realise the small packet of soy milk that you drink with lunch every day, for example, can be two servings, doubling the calories listed on the label.
- * Don't feel obliged to clean your plate. Stop eating as soon as you feel full. Those extra bites of food that you are trying not to waste add unnecessary calories.

Managing your calorie intake is essential to weight control. Still, it is only part of the weight-loss and maintenance equation.

For a successful and sustainable weight management plan, you need to increase your physical activity while

decreasing the calories you take in. This combination of regular activity and healthy eating will help you achieve a healthy weight to prevent or manage diabetes. Also, staying committed by setting realistic goal is also part of the formula to effective weight loss.

References:

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