

Fuel Your Metabolism

By Lisa Schilling RN

What we eat is so much more than just food. It is fuel for our body. Most people pay closer attention to how they fuel their car, than they do their body. What we eat, how much and when, will directly affect how we feel. Ensuring adequate fruits and vegetables, lean protein, and complex carbs is important. It is important to have a good understanding of what is going on with your body. Keeping a food log for a while can be a great place to create awareness and to find ways to accomplish fuel balance. When presented with large meals, it can feel difficult to stop eating before feeling fullness. Make your goal to not eat until fullness. Over time you can develop creative ways to achieve this. Creating smaller eating episodes can help. Your body needs extra time for complete digestion before eating again. Eating too much at one sitting can become a simple bad habit. Making 1 meal into 2 and saving the second half for later can help spread out meals and decrease the over-full feeling that saps energy and lowers metabolism. Also planning “go-to” snack/meals that you enjoy and are nutritious, can help to keep you on track.

Try to avoid going longer than 4 hours without some form of nutrition. Your body uses this frequent **food for fuel** to keep your metabolism burning. Go longer than 4 hours without eating and your body can start to **conserve fat and energy** in an attempt to stave off a perceived future possibility of starvation (Basic Stone-Age Adaptation). Consider ways you can break up your eating to keep your metabolism revved up. Another issue to consider is artificial sweeteners. In moderation they are generally harmless, but when eaten regularly and in quantity they can have an adverse affect on your health and metabolism. Consider cutting back on them when you have the choice. I also recommend varying your total intake.

Never follow a reduced-calorie plan for greater than 72 hours. Go beyond that, and the body will begin to actively conserve fat and store it, because it was designed for self-preservation and it is now sensing starvation. At this point you will need to shift your calorie intake higher for a few days and then you can lower again after 3 to 4 days, if you choose to. While you are training your body, it is vital to maintain your **hydration**. Be sure to drink plenty of non-caffeinated fluids, especially water. As your activity increases your water needs can increase also. Studies also suggest that regularly sipping on ice water can activate your metabolism by forcing your body to warm it as you consume. Little things like that can keep your metabolism stoked up.

When the body is in a **fat storage mode** it tries to conserve energy. Because the body was once designed for the survival principle, it sensed long famines and would store fat for survival during that time. The body now sees a “diet” greater than 72 hours, as a possible famine and this triggers it to store fat and conserve energy. Through the release of fat storage hormones, your body is hard wired for prehistoric survival. The only problem is that we do not live in the Stone Age and we have an overabundance of food choices.

The simple act of initiating **active movement** can be enough to signal the body to release fat. It will then give you the energy you need. When the body feels that its very survival is based on you being able to flee from danger, it will give you what you need to do that. That means having energy and getting leaner. When you look at it that way, exercise is very worth your time. Committing to an “every-30 minutes stretch” is another metabolism booster. Try to get up and move at least every 30 minutes. It does not have to be a big exercise; just activate the muscles by walking, stretching or doing a simple exercise. This active movement keeps your metabolism from going into hibernation mode where fat conservation is started.

Active movement activates your “survival” response. This means you often lose weight faster as your body feels it must lighten the load, to facilitate future activity. The body was once trained to sense activity as a need to flee from danger. This caused it to release fat storage so you could flee faster and thus *survive*. It is important to stop associating exercise with just calories burned. If that was the only benefit you obtained from exercise, I could easily see how it would not be worth your time.

Active movement does many things beyond burning calories. It releases endorphins that make you feel good and it also signals your body to start working more efficiently. It turns off fat storage hormones and signals the release of energy for you to complete needed tasks. It basically unlocks the door to how your body functions. Unlock your success today with these simple metabolism boosters!