



Seven Keys to Jump Start Your Metabolism At Any Age

We love to blame a sluggish metabolism on aging, but in fact, lifestyle is the biggest contributor. There are many factors that are well within our control to give our metabolism a boost!

Key #1: Eat breakfast

Metabolism is all about putting logs on the fire. How can you make the fire burn stronger without putting more logs on it? Our bodies are burning calories 24 hours per day, however, they are burning them at the slowest rate while we are sleeping. Without something to jump start it in the morning, our metabolic rates may stay at a suppressed level for several hours into the day. The act of eating and digesting food increases our metabolic rate. We need that increase to start off the day with a bang of calorie burning. Some people say that they are hungrier throughout the day if they eat breakfast (thinking that's a "bad" thing). It's actually a sign that your body is burning calories...a GOOD thing!

Key #2: Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day

If you throw a huge log on a fire, you'll smother it. Kindling - small twigs and branches, help the fire burn stronger without smothering it. Your body can metabolize small meals much more easily than large meals. Eating small, frequent meals increases your metabolism in several ways. First, you are getting the benefit of the digestion-induced increase in metabolic rate numerous times per day – that's the "frequent" part. The "small" part is just as important. Our bodies can only burn approximately 200-400 calories at a given time. If you eat more than that in one sitting, your body will be less likely to burn all of it as energy. The excess is likely relegated to storage, ie fat cells. If you limit calories to 200-400 every 3-4 hours, your stomach will grumble signaling that it is time for more food, and you then eat another 200-400 calories. Many of us are so used to eating by the clock or out of stress, boredom, etc., that we have lost touch with true hunger-satiety signals. Try breakfast, mid-morning snack, late lunch, late afternoon snack, dinner, and sometimes a light evening snack. Another benefit of small, frequent meals is to help keep your blood sugar level steadier. When you are never ravenous, you are less likely to overeat. The trick is to keep the frequent meals small. Don't increase the total number of calories per day, just spread them out.

Key #3: Include a mix with fiber and protein at every meal or snack

When you eat simple sugars/carbs, especially alone (i.e. a bagel, candy bar, donut, etc.), it is digested very easily and increases your blood sugar very quickly. This causes a reactionary quick increase in insulin. Often, the insulin response overshoots the amount needed and the result is then a quick DROP in blood sugar. That is why a sugary snack will actually leave you feeling hungrier and/or tired not long after eating it, and craving more of the same. When you include fiber (whole fruit, whole grains) and protein (a dairy, meat or nut source) with your meal or snack, it slows down the digestive process and allows you to feel full longer. Your body will have a slower and milder increase in blood sugar and therefore a more modest insulin reaction and then no rebound low blood sugar. You will feel good from meal to meal – no more of that gnawing "I'm still hungry, what else can I eat" feeling.

Key #4: Do aerobic exercise on a regular basis

Aerobic exercise is great for burning a large number of calories in a short amount of time; therefore it increases the total number of calories you burn in a day. However, aerobic exercise also has other benefits that increase the amount of calories you burn throughout the day. Your body will continue to burn at a higher rate for several hours after each aerobic workout. Therefore, the more often you engage in aerobic exercise, the more benefit you'll see. In addition, when you increase your aerobic fitness level, your body increases the size and number of mitochondria in your muscle cells - the "powerhouse of the cell" – THE calorie burning force within the cell. When a cell has more mitochondria, the cell is more metabolically active at rest and during activity. You will burn more calories all throughout the day because your muscle cells will be in a more constant state of vibration. If you are already engaging in regular aerobic exercise, you can make more gains by varying the type of aerobic exercise or by doing interval training (alternating high intensity bursts with lower intensity aerobic exercise).

Key #5: Do weight training exercise on a regular basis

Weight training exercise may be the single best investment you can make in increasing your metabolic rate. If your metabolism is like a fire, then a muscle cell is a furnace. Weight training increases the size and efficiency of your muscle cells giving you a larger and stronger furnace. Although each weight-training workout may not burn a huge number of calories during the workout, it represents a significant investment in the number of calories your body can burn throughout the day. You increase your resting metabolic rate as well as the metabolic rate of every level of activity you can do. If you are already doing weight training on a regular basis, you can increase the impact by varying the exercises or the weight, sets, and repetitions. Once again, variety is the key to keeping the body adapting.

Key #6: Increase your activity throughout the day

The average person burns approximately one calorie per minute, sitting at rest. The same person, while standing, will burn **1.5** calories per minute. You may be thinking "an extra half calorie...big deal". While that may not seem significant for one minute, or even one hour, **50% more calories to stand vs. sit** is a pretty big deal when you spend a good part of your day sitting vs. standing. Walking at a leisurely pace burns approximately two calories per minute – **double** that of sitting! Aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, jogging, etc. can burn up to 8-12 calories per minute. That's why aerobic exercise is a great way to burn a nice extra chunk of calories per day and can help with weight loss. But, since aerobic exercise isn't realistically going to account for a very big part of your day, it's a good idea to give some thought to the daily activities that make up the "other 23 hours of the day". They truly add up!

Key #7: Don't fall prey to fad or crash diets

Don't let your resting metabolic rate drop by letting your body think there is a famine occurring. Just as meal skipping reduces your metabolic rate on a day-to-day basis, crash dieting reduces your metabolic rate on a longer-term basis. Your body learns to conserve energy when it thinks there will not be much energy coming in. In addition, when you starve your body, it compensates by increasing fat storage hormones and enzymes at the fat cell borders. At some point during your crash diet, your brain will send VERY strong signals to EAT! (And it won't be signaling for salad...chocolate is more likely.) And when you do the post-diet binge, you are doing so with a suppressed metabolic rate and fat cells that are primed to store more than ever.

All of these keys are important, but things we overlook in our busy, daily lives, thinking they will not make "that much of a difference". In reality, our health is very often determined by lots of little things that add up and it's never too late or too early to take action!

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