**METABOLISM**

How is metabolism related to body weight? Simply put, metabolism is the process of breaking down proteins, carbohydrates, and fats to produce the energy your body needs to maintain itself. The rate of your metabolism depends on the number of calories you burn based on your individual genetic makeup.

Faster metabolism results in burning more calories. How can you increase your metabolism? The best way to rev up your metabolism is to increase your body’s need for energy.

Your body can burn calories from either fat, protein or carbs. Of course, you’d rather it burns fat calories so that you lose weight, but unfortunately the body only burns fat if it requires energy and doesn’t have carbs or proteins to burn.

The body will burn fat during exercise, but it’s difficult to exercise *all* the time, especially if you’re stuck at a desk all day. Luckily, your body requires extra energy at other times, too, such as during the first hour or two after intense exercise like interval training and weight lifting. This is called the “afterburn” effect.

And simply being more muscular boosts your body’s energy needs. Each extra pound of muscle you carry can burn up to 50 additional calories just to maintain itself – and with no effort on your part. You can also increase your metabolism by eating foods that require extra energy to digest and metabolize, for example, protein. Your body burns twice as many calories digesting high-protein foods as it does foods that are high in carbs or fat. (So eat nuts instead of cookies).

Metabolism *does* slow down with age, starting at about age 25, the average person’s metabolism declines between 5% and 10% per decade. But this decline can be offset by increasing physical activity levels. Exercise regularly and integrate high intensity exercise into your workout. For example, during your aerobic session, after about 3 minutes at your regular speed, bump up the pace for just 30 seconds. Alternate this way throughout your session and you’ll burn another 100-200 calories!

Get adequate sleep – skimping on sleep can significantly reduce your metabolism and result in weight gain. So try to get 6-8 hours per night.

Eat frequent meals (about every 2-3 hours), but make sure you eat nutritionally sound foods. Avoid snacks. Every 2-3 hours eat a mini-meal of protein, vegetables and fiber. Skipping breakfast, eating only a sandwich for lunch and then piling on the dinner causes your body to store fat. Research shows that people who eat nutritionally sound foods every 2 to 3 hours have less body fat and faster metabolisms than those who eat 3 meals per day.

Don’t be misled about miracle boosters like green tea, hot peppers and the like. While these foods do elevate metabolism, it’s not enough to make a difference in your weight. Fish oil is another story, however. Researchers have found that the omega-3 fatty acids, found only in fish oil, may be able to boost metabolism by 400 calories per day.

**Finally, get physical.** Never sit when you can stand, or stand still when you can walk. Thanks to desk jobs, family commitments, and a great lineup of must-see TV shows, most of us move less at ages 30, 40 and beyond than we did during our teens and twenties. Regular periods of movement – whether it’s a trip to the office water cooler or a stroll around the block after lunch – nudges a sluggish metabolism into gear, lifting your spirits and obliterating excess fat.

So, the good news is that we aren’t at the mercy of our genes. There are healthy behaviors we can adopt to increase our metabolism and lose those extra pounds.

For more information, please contact your health professional.

Be Well!