



## Calorie confusion can derail weight loss

**I want to lose weight, but I don't want to go "on a diet" — diets have never worked for me in the past. Any ideas?**

You have discovered what most dietitians know from experience: When people go "on" a diet, they also tend to go "off" the diet. Losing weight and maintaining the loss requires a perpetual shift in lifestyle and eating habits — not a temporary sprint of healthful activity followed by your "normal" routine. Regular monitoring and reinforcement of healthy behaviors can help you stay on track.

A recent Food and Health survey by the International Food Information Council Foundation shows that a lot of people are in your shoes: 70 percent said they have made changes in their eating patterns in the last year in an attempt to lose weight. But there's a problem. Of those trying to lose weight, 60 percent said they are trying to reduce the number of calories they consume. However, when asked how many calories they should be consuming per day, only 11 percent estimated correctly, and 31 percent didn't even venture a guess.

An easy way to find out how many calories per day is right for you is to go to <http://mypyramid.gov>, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Pyramid Web site. There, click on "MyPyramid Plan" to get personalized information based on your height, current weight, sex and activity level.

Then, at least for a few days, count your calories. Use Nutrition Facts

labels, a calorie-counter book or an online nutrient database, and weigh and measure your foods. If you're not on target, you will at least get a good idea where you should cut back.

If counting calories doesn't appeal, try some simpler strategies as a start:

- Eat more fruits and vegetables. According to the Food and Health survey, only 12 percent of Americans eat five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Generally, try to eat 2.5 cups of vegetables per day, and 1.5 to 2 cups of fruits. It's not hard: a small apple (2.5 inches in diameter, the size of a baseball) counts as 1 cup of fruit. See "Inside the Pyramid" on the MyPyramid Web site for more guidance.

- Cut back on your portions of other types of foods. A serving of meat, for example, should be about 3 ounces — about the size of a deck of cards. Take the "Portion Distortion" quizzes at <http://hp2010.nhlbi-hin.net/portion/> to learn how today's portion sizes compare with 20 years ago. To better manage portions, fill your dinner plate with one-quarter meat or other protein; one-quarter carbohydrate; and half vegetables.

- Get moving. Physical activity — whether it's a visit to the fitness center or doing the gardening, cleaning the house, or taking a walk after dinner — is key in weight loss. Get at least a half-hour of activity a day, or an hour or more whenever you can fit it in.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [f Filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:f Filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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**Editor:**

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