

Get the Facts - Counting Calories

MYTH:

Counting calories is:

- A waste of time
- For women
- For people on “diets”
- Not feasible
- Too difficult
- Not important
- Confusing

FACT:

This week's article will be more of a recount of my own experiences and understanding so I will not have sources at the end, please let me know if you would like some literature on this topic!

Referring back to the article on calories and energy consumption, fat loss is based under the overarching principle of energy consumed/energy expended. If this ratio is <1 , weight loss will occur. The variables lie in the speed of the loss and manipulation of either the numerator, denominator, or both. I will focus on the numerator (energy consumed). The first (and most important in my opinion) point I want to make it that it is extremely difficult to manipulate this variable when it is not measured. Estimates can be made based on a thorough understanding of what one is eating and how calorie dense the meals are, but this takes more time, effort, and planning than actually counting the calories you eat.

Side Bar: The name “calorie counting” is super stigmatized and is not a great term. I call it food tracking or logging.

The vast majority of people perceive that they are eating less calories than they truly are and after food logging, are surprised by the results. In my personal experience, almost every client I have had who had a weight loss goal saw that the calories they ate were far above what they believed they were consuming. This is beneficial in a few ways. For example, the shock is usually helpful in motivating the client to cut down on consumption, and it helps them to tailor their diet down to the amount of calories they thought they should have been eating.

Without knowing how much you are consuming, it is difficult to adjust accordingly to create a successful nutrition plan. Many say how difficult and time consuming this is, however, technology has made it excessively simple. There is a myriad of smart phone apps (for free) which allow you to simply scan the bar code of the food you eat and it enters every nutrition fact available for that food. Better yet, it keeps track of frequent foods so you can just tap your most recent and just enter what you had the day before, let's face it our diets don't really vary that much.

If the settings are too difficult you can have a nutritionist, personal trainer, doctor, or fitness friend set the app for you. Say technology is not your thing, you can purchase (for pretty cheap) food logs where you can simply write what you ate. Admittedly this takes a little more time but it is still feasible.

One final important plug for food tracking, friends (ie. Your trainer, friend, doctor) can look at your log online and help you adjust as needed.

Conclusion:

I have been tracking my food for over 6 years now and I had the same thoughts and difficulties I hear from people who are looking to change. Trust that once it becomes a habit, it becomes so easy that you don't notice you are doing it. And to dispel the whole myth that it may only be for women, bodybuilders across the board start with tracking their food (men and women alike).

Finally, for the medical professionals, this is a great way to begin a patients' journey to healthier habits. It is far less scary to them than telling them to stop eating everything and start eating omega 3s, antioxidants, or phytonutrients. Tracking is a great first step and immensely helpful throughout major (or minor) dietary lifestyle changes. If you go by the motto "you are what you eat," how do you know what you are if you don't know what you eat?