

To Count or Not to Count

I am not one to count calories and that's mainly because I am not detail oriented or patient enough to do so. Maybe I can handle a week or two but that would be it, and truthfully I have other things I would rather be doing, like planning and cooking meals that I know are not overly high in calories and are nutrient dense so that I don't have to worry about the calorie part too much.

Calorie counting can become a mundane and frustrating thing to do and you can easily become obsessed with it. If it works for you then that is great. It's definitely more beneficial than not calorie counting and eating everything in sight. There are even some great calorie-counting programs out there that make it quite easy such as 'MyFitnessPal', which I have recommended to clients in the past to use if they want to calorie count. Weight Watchers can be quite successful because they tally up calories by a points program and the goal is you stay in your targeted points range, and at the end of the day it really comes down to creating a calorie deficit, so yes you will lose weight if you do this. BUT...



There are Inaccuracies with Calorie Counting

All calories are not created equal – Yes a calorie is a calorie if you are simply calorie counting for weight loss but not too concerned on the quality of your food or the nutrients your body is getting. For example, if you are eating a bagel for breakfast, a brownie and chips for your snacks and a salad for your lunch and dinner and a cookie before bedtime you could very well be within your targeted calorie range for the day even though most of what you ate is junk food, and truthfully this may even lead to weight loss but you would be consuming empty calories which means calories with no nutritious value. What is the problem, you ask? You need nutrients to have good health, good skin, nice nails and hair, less colds and flus, and to prevent you from other illnesses and diseases, along with so many other important things. If you are exercising, the nutrients that the food provides you with, will help build and maintain your muscle mass. Junk food isn't

going to do that. The other issue is that eating junk food will only keep you full for a short period of time, and then you are likely to binge eat because you are starving and who knows how many calories are being consumed at that point. Therefore, if you are just calorie counting but not caring about the actual type of food that is getting you to reach your target for the day, then you may actually be doing more harm than good. Eat healthy proteins, healthy grains, veggies, fruits and good fats and you will feel fuller longer, equaling to fewer binges, leading to less calorie intake.

Not all Calories are burned equally – The way your body digests and metabolizes food is different from how your neighbour does. When you pop 4 cookies in your mouth that are labeled as having 160 calories this may not be completely accurate for you. It could be a difference of 10 calories or 20 calories but this goes for every piece of food you are consuming throughout the day, which adds up. If there are 3,500 calories in a pound of fat (which research tells me so) and you have ‘miscalculated’ by 50 calories in the wrong direction, by no fault of yours, this can add FIVE POUNDS of FAT in one year. Holy moly! That is 25 lbs of fat in a five-year span, ouch! Look at the image below.

The way we cook our food can also change the caloric value of a food and different types of food are digested differently, which again, changes things. For example, protein may require five times more energy than fat to digest but food labels do not account for this expenditure. Because digestion is such a complex affair, finding out the exact calorie consumption becomes very difficult.

Tip! If you feel that calorie counting works to keep you on target then continue to do it, just make sure the food you are eating to reach your targeted calorie goal for the day includes good quality whole foods, minimal processed food, and be sure to include exercising in your daily routine.

Tip! If you are like me and calorie counting just isn't for you, then what you need to do is be aware. Be aware of the quality of food you are consuming, making sure that you are eating good proteins, lots of veggies, not too many starchy carbohydrates and ensuring they are healthier ones, some grain, some healthy fats and some fruit. Stay away from processed, packaged foods. **Be aware of your portions. Exercise.** You must exercise to burn more calories, which in turn will actually allow you to eat more. Remember, the more muscle you build in your body the more calories you will burn at rest. **Build muscle!**

Accuracy of Calories Burned on a Cardio Machine

This brings us to the next calorie counting issue. When counting calories you will most likely also be counting calories burned during exercise (if you are exercising which I hope you are!) The cardio machines such as treadmills, elliptical, bikes, steppers etc. that you see at the gym or possibly in your own home all have a display that tells you the amount of calories burned and usually they ask you for your age, weight and maybe even gender. This all helps with an accurate calculation for sure, but one thing the machines do not factor in is your fitness level. Everyone has a different fitness level and this is where the inaccuracy may take place. Someone who is more fit and has less body fat than someone else who is overweight and doesn't exercise often is going to burn less calories than the latter, regardless if they are the same age, weigh the same and are the same gender using the same piece of equipment. The more fit you become and the more used to an exercise your body becomes, the fewer calories you will burn. So again, its hard to be 100% accurate in your calorie counting which takes you back to the point I made above that if there is a miscalculation by 50 calories, this can add 5 lbs of fat to your body over a span of one year.

Tip! Every time you jump on a piece of cardio equipment, or go out for a run or a bike ride, push yourself just a little harder. A few extra minutes, and higher intensity will keep your body working hard and giving you the calorie burn you need. Higher intensity workouts will not only burn calories while you are working but will continue to burn calories after you are done. How awesome!

