

# Metabolism Magic

*Find the right balance for your body*

BY CAROLINE SMITH, M.S.

Have you ever noticed that at times you eat and eat and eat and don't seem to get satisfied? Or you're so full you couldn't possibly eat more, yet you're still hungry? Or after eating a meal you want to take a nap or have heavy eyelids?

These are just many of the little metabolic messages our bodies give us when things aren't in balance. If we know what to do to prevent these feelings, or know how to change them when they do occur, we will feel better, have more energy and lose body fat.

Food is fuel, and powerful enough to be considered a drug. The combination of protein, carbohydrates and fats at a meal greatly influences how our bodies digest and use the food for fuel, thereby affecting how we feel. The two key elements of our metabolism are how much activity we do, and how often (and what) we eat. The key is to balance the calories in with the calories out.

Muscle is more metabolic than fat and therefore has a greater demand of protein. If the muscle is not fed sufficiently, the body will use the glucose, which is stored in the muscle as glycogen, for energy. This can leave you weak and without energy. Once you eat you feel better, but it is often only temporary, as you must continue to replenish the lost glycogen supply.

When making protein choices, try to use the lower-fat options such as chicken and fish, egg whites, and low-fat dairy selections. If using red meat or pork, use smaller portions and recognize that they are providing higher levels of fat, so you'll need to adjust the rest of the meal's fat selection. If you are vegetarian, be sure you are bringing in protein sources somewhere to maintain a stable blood glucose level.

Once the appropriate amount of protein is calculated, we then balance the carbohydrates and fats. Most of us know that carbohydrates are found in breads, pasta, grains and cereals, but fruits and vegetables also are great sources of carbohydrates. Our bodies don't digest starches very well, so it's a good idea to remember the fruits and vegetables.

Use lots of vegetables in your salads and at all meals. Watch too many quick-converting vegetables like corn, peas, potatoes, and carrots. It's not that you can't have these, but realize that they convert to sugar very rapidly and set you into a pattern of eating frequently without getting satisfied. Also, try to use whole fruits more than juices. If you do have the juice, squeeze your own or choose those that are pure, not from concentrate. The fruits that convert to sugar rapidly are bananas, dried fruits and raisins. Use these in small amounts.

Sugar craves sugar. For example, if you have a breakfast high in sugar content, which could be from foods that convert to sugar (glucose) quickly (bagels, potatoes, grains) you will often crave something at mid-afternoon and want a quick pick-me-up from a soda or candy bar. Instead, reach for a stable combination such as a half cup of plain low-fat yogurt with cinnamon for flavor and a film canister full of sliced almonds. This provides you with the proper balance of protein, carbohydrates and fats. (Men should increase this one to two times.)

Fats are very important for your immunity, elasticity of your ligaments, skin moisture, satiety after a meal and the bowel-cleansing process. We all know that too much can be bad for you, so the key is proper balance in context for the whole day, spread out through lots of little feedings. The good choices come from the many foods we have been programmed not to eat, such as olives, avocados, nuts, nut butters and olive or canola oil. These foods are rich in the right kinds of oil. (Just remember to use small amounts.)

Other fats, such as butter, cream cheese, mayonnaise and sour cream are more saturated (solid), and in excessive amounts lead to an increase in health risks. It's not that you can't enjoy these – simply use small amounts and balance within the context of the day's choices.

Being in control of your choices is very important because it then becomes a lifestyle you can maintain. Once you see how you feel by combining the protein, carbohydrates and fats in the proper ratio

for your muscle mass and activity, you will experience a whole new level of energy, alertness and restfulness.

Finally, if your exercise is not at the appropriate level of intensity for your present conditioning level and age, you will be defeating so much of what you are trying to accomplish. If you are out killing yourself every time you exercise, you will not stick with it for very long and you will tend to crave more sugary foods due to being depleted of glycogen. Getting on an exercise program that uses your heart rate as your training partner lets you adjust according to the messages your body gives you.

With the holidays around the corner, it is helpful to know the tips and tricks of how to balance your food choices and maintain an exercise schedule when time is limited. If we listen to the messages in our own bodies, we can find a great balance and implement changes towards better health.



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At 21 years of age, Caroline weighed 158 pounds and had 30 percent body fat. She tried dieting, indulged in excessive exercise, consumed over-the-counter diet pills and experimented with just about every fad program. She finally found the answer: balance. Now, at 38, 119 pounds and 14 percent body fat, Caroline believes her mission is to help others find the balance in their bodies between water intake, exercise intensity and proper food choices. A retired world-ranked triathlete, Caroline Smith offers tips and tricks of body balancing. She can be contacted at the SportSense Co., 303.471.4725.