Ideal caloric intake? [1]

Alice,

What is the ideal calorie intake per day?

? Confused by the news

Answer

Dear Confused by the news,

While this sounds like such a simple question, it's really not. First, what is ideal? The amount of calories needed to maintain each individual's weight appropriate for optimal health? The amount a person needs to maintain an unnaturally thin weight that meets false societal ideals? The amount an athlete needs to perform at her/his best? Reality tells us that the ideal caloric intake is different for everyone.

Caloric needs depend on age, gender, height, present weight, body frame, physical activities, hormones, and weight plans (maintain, gain, lose, etc). An intake between 1200 and 1400 calories per day is considered a low intake. This calorie level is just able to meet what are called basal metabolic needs, or the calorie needs to keep the heart beating and all the internal organs working. Calorie levels below 1200 should be avoided, because they may decrease metabolism and are usually hard to follow for any length of time. Very low caloric intake may promote binge eating due to the feeling of deprivation, and may be deficient in one or more nutrients. Some liquid diets call for fewer than 1200 calories, however, their long-term effectiveness is controversial, and they should only be followed under the supervision of a health care provider.

The Daily Values (DV) used on food labels base their nutrient intake on a 2000 calorie per day diet. This was a result of many long meetings with nutrition experts who concluded that 2000 calories was the average amount needed by American adults. Therefore, short, thin females who are not active, will have caloric needs below 2000. For those who are "average" size and get moderate activity, caloric needs to maintain weight should be about 1600 to 2400 per day.

Instead of just worrying about a number of calories, have you tried listening to your own internal needs? Have you set goals related to healthy eating? Consider a focus on maintaining a balanced eating plan that includes a strong base in whole plant foods (fruit, vegetables and grains) and eat a moderate amount of healthy fats. Also don't go overboard on
eating food just because it is fat-free (i.e., a whole box of "fat-free" cookies). Although fat calories are most easily converted to fat in the body, all calories from fat, carbohydrate and protein count! Finally, don't neglect what pleasure food can bring and that it serves many needs other than energy functions.

If you would like to explore your individual caloric needs, or have other nutrition questions, you might consider talking to your health care provider or making an appointment with a registered dietitian. You can also review many options and create your own plan using the online resources at MyPlate [2]. Have fun determining the right balance for you and your goals. Remember to try new foods and new food combinations? there are lots of healthy and tasty options. Eat and be well!

Alice!
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Nutrition & Physical Activity [3]
Optimal Nutrition [4]

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Resources
Medical Services (Morningside) [11]
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Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside) [13]
Student Health Service Nutrition Services (CUMC) [14]
get balanced! Guide for Healthier Eating (Morningside) [15]

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