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## Figuring out maintenance calories

As you explore the world of calorie counting as part of your weight loss journey, you may come across a new term: maintenance calories. What are maintenance calories? Simply put, maintenance calories are the number of calories your body needs to carry out everyday functions. These essentially include bodily functions, like digestion, plus activities you perform on a regular basis, which include everything from running to typing. To calculate your maintenance calories, you need to know how much energy your body burns daily. This measurement, known as your Total Daily Energy Expenditure (or TDEE), takes into account your body’s essential energy needs (your Basal Metabolic Rate, or BMR) and your typical activity level. These are the measurements you’ll need to have handy to calculate your TDEE: Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR)Body Fat PercentagePhysical Activity Multiplier Basal Metabolic Rate If you’re a woman, multiply your weight in pounds by 10 to determine your BMR. If you’re a man, multiply your weight in pounds by 11 to determine your BMR. Body Fat Percentage Before you can calculate your maintenance calories, you’ll need to figure out your body fat percentage. You can use an Internet-based calculator like this one. Physical Activity Multiplier To determine your physical activity multiplier, check out the chart below: Level of activityWomenMenSedentary on an average day (e.g. desk work)1.31.3Light activity on an average day (e.g. running errands, fast paced schedule)1.51.6Moderate exercise most days of the week (e.g. fast paced schedule, intentional exercise routines)1.61.7Active on an average day (e.g. intentional exercise routines and/or picking things up, errands, delivery etc)1.92.1Very active throughout the day2.22.4 Total Daily Energy Expenditure Your TDEE is the same as your maintenance calories. Remember that this number is not constant. It will fluctuate depending on your lifestyle, diet, and activity level. How do you calculate your TDEE? There’s a useful online TDEE calculator (for which you’ll need to know your body fat percentage). Alternatively, you can calculate your maintenance calories manually, using the following formula: BMR x physical activity multiplier = maintenance calories(TDEE) Maintaining Your Ideal Body Weight by Counting Calories If you’re entering the weight loss space, the topic of counting calories is bound to come up. Generally speaking, understanding your maintenance calories is useful; it establishes a baseline. One way to look at it is that if you don’t change anything else in your daily routine but consume more calories than this baseline, you’ll gain weight. Conversely, if you go below this baseline, you’ll lose weight. To maintain weight, you will want to eat a fairly consistent diet that meets your baseline; this is especially relevant if you’ve reached your ideal weight and would like to stay there. By slightly shifting your calorie intake, you can adjust your weight or focus on different goals, such as bulking up, improving endurance, or toning areas of your body. Calculate how many calories you should eat Calorie needs are different for men and women. According to the US Department of Health, men generally need an average of 2000-3000 calories per day (BMI =22.5), and women typically require 1600-2400 calories (BMI= 21.5). You can use calorie calculators to estimate your daily caloric needs. However, since everyone’s body is different, you should keep in mind your particular needs. How many calories should I burn a day? The number of calories you should burn a day depends almost entirely on your personal fitness goals-make sure you have already defined these. Perhaps your goal is to reach a target weight or reach a target body fat percentage? Generally speaking, the average adult body burns 2,000 - 2,500 kcal a day. How quickly your body turns food into energy, also known as your metabolism, will vary depending on gender, activity level, age, and any underlying health conditions (e.g., thyroid issues, hormonal imbalances). Also, the number of calories you burn will vary from day to day. Just as there are applications to count calories, there are ways to track the calories you burn throughout the day in the activities you perform. Gadgets, like Fitbit, are a perfect example. If you’re aiming to maintain your weight, make sure you’re following your maintenance calories and, if applicable, sticking to a consistent exercise routine. If you’d like to lose 5 lbs, you’ll have to burn more calories through exercise or consume a lesser amount than your maintenance calories. If you do both of these actions, you’ll lose weight more quickly. You’ll notice that significant weight loss does not occur overnight. That’s because much of our weight fluctuations relate to water retention and water weight. However, if you stick to a plan, you’ll start noticing gradual changes. Slow and steady wins the race! Why count calories at all? Whether calorie counting is an efficient approach to weight management is a controversial question. Many people find this approach restrictive. Even if this is the case, it can also be useful, especially when you first figure out the maintenance calories you need and begin building from there. By counting your calories, you’re learning more about yourself than just your calorie intake. You’re learning about your eating choices, exercise habits, and the nutritional benefits of different types of food. You’ll be much better informed about your own body, its needs, and the costs and benefits of certain foods. For many people, tracking numbers is satisfying and motivating. After a couple of weeks of tracking calories, it will come more naturally, and you’ll start to observe an upward or downward trend. Even if you decide not to stick to calorie counting in the long term, it’s a good thing to try at some point along your weight loss journey—you’ll surely learn more than you expect! Nutrition & Fitness Calculators Use this TDEE calculator to quickly find your Total Daily Exercise Expenditure also known as your calorie needs. Need Your TDEE calculated by an expert? Let our certified nutritional specialist do all the work for you to get your weight loss TDEE calculation that takes into consideration all your lifestyle factors. Learn more here. Every day your body burns a specific number of calories just by existing. This is known as your Basal Metabolic Rate. The BMR is based on your weight, height, and age. (Calculate your BMR here) When you exercise or simply expend energy through physical activity, you burn additional calories. When you combine your BMR with the calories you burn through physical activity, you get your Total Daily Energy Expenditure. This is what is known as your maintenance calories. If you eat this amount of calories you will maintain your weight. Therefore, this calorie intake calculator shows you what you should be eating to maintain your current weight. Use it as a Weight Loss Calculator You lose weight by having a calorie deficit. A calorie deficit is eating less than your body needs to maintain itself and thus creating a deficit. Ever had more bills than you had money? You had a financial deficit. A calorie deficit is having less energy than you need to stay the same weight. Let’s say that based on your age, weight, and height your BMR is 1700 calories and through some physical activity you end up with a TDEE of 2300 calories. To maintain your weight you simply eat 2300 calories every day. To use this tool as a weight loss calculator, deduct 20% from the maintenance TDEE is calculates. To gain weight you eat more than your TDEE and to lose weight you eat less. Of course, you can also achieve a deficit through burning more calories through exercise. Every effective diet I’ve come across, whether it’s high fat, low fat, high carb, low carb, uses a calorie deficit to achieve weight loss. How Many Calories Are We Talking? Technically you can eat nothing all day and achieve weight loss through having a calorie deficit. Many “miracle diets” claim incredible results through eating specific magical foods or using unique protocols. Unfortunately many diets out there are nothing more than glorified Crash Diets. These diets put you into a severe caloric deficit resulting in, yes weight loss (usually short-term), but they can also cause health complications and damage to your metabolism. To avoid doing damage, the general recommendation I’ve found and used is 20% calories less than your TDEE. Some people advise more, but I’ve found that to be unnecessary. Also, having any more than a 20% calorie deficit makes it likely that along with losing fat you will lose lean muscle, which is not ideal as lean muscle helps burn additional calories. There are 3500 calories in a pound of fat, so at a 20% calorie deficit a day most people will lose about a pound in a week. (src.) Note that your body can become conditioned to the same repeated exercise and/or diet. This can affect your daily calorie intake and TDEE (see more about this). It’s always a good idea to switch things up from time to time bit exercise-wise and diet-wise. How Do I Get Started? I suggest that you use Macro Counting to accomplish the goal of hitting your daily calorie intake and creating a calorie deficit in order to lose weight in a healthy and sustainable way. Counting Macros (a.k.a. flexible dieting) is non-restrictive and allows you to eat all of your favorite foods as long as they fit within your TDEE and macro goals. 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This value is multiplied by an activity factor (generally 1.2-1.95), dependent on a person’s typical levels of exercise, in order to obtain a more realistic value for maintaining body-weight (since people are less likely to be at rest throughout the course of an entire day). 1 pound, or approximately 0.45 kg, equates to about 3,500 calories. As such, in order to lose 1 pound per week, it is recommended that 500 calories be shaved off the estimate of calories necessary for weight maintenance per day. For example, if a person has an estimated allotment of 2,500 calories per day to maintain body-weight, consuming 2,000 calories per day for one week would theoretically result in 3,500 additional calories. There are 3500 calories in a pound of fat, so at a 20% calorie deficit a day most people will lose about a pound in a week. (src.) Note that your body can become conditioned to the same repeated exercise and/or diet. 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All the conflicting diets and controversial advice from health gurus are enough to give anyone a headache. Focus on your TDEE, which has proven time and time again, to be the most important tool for weight loss and getting healthier. FAQs regarding your TDEE. Does it matter what you eat if you count calories? Yes and no. Regarding weight loss, you can eat nothing but snack cakes or pizza and still lose weight if you maintain a calorie deficit. (This has been proven by several studies.) But in regards to healthy body composition and overall good health, a balanced diet is recommended. This is why we recommend tracking macros as a way to ensure that you are getting enough of each macronutrient and in turn micronutrients from
ensuring that you are eating plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit. Does TDEE include exercise? Yes, the TDEE is your total daily energy expenditure so it should be factored to include all the movement you do in a 24 hour period. Even if you are sedentary there is still movement factored in because you are still doing activity around the house, eating, showering, running errands, etc. Don’t confuse TDEE for your REE which is your energy expenditure if you simply laid in bed all day and did absolutely nothing. How can I calculate my calorie intake? Calculating your TDEE or daily calorie intake using the calculator above is also calculating your calories. Your TDEE is an estimation of how many calories you need in one day. Once you have your calories calculated, you can focus on reducing your calories in a way that will help you reach your fat loss goals. calculating your TDEE is one of the best ways to calculate your calories. 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