

## 4.2: Balancing Calories

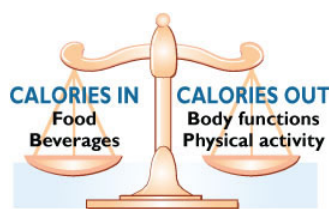
### Finding a Balance

**More than one third of U.S. adults are obese.** Weight gain occurs when you consume more calories than your body uses. Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight will help you prevent and control many diseases and conditions. The key is “Finding a Balance” in your lifestyle that includes healthy eating and regular physical activity.

### The Caloric Balance Equation

When it comes to maintaining a healthy weight for a lifetime, the bottom line is – **calories count!** Weight management is all about balance—balancing the number of calories you consume with the number of calories your body uses or “burns off.”

- A *calorie* is defined as a unit of energy supplied by food. A calorie is a calorie regardless of its source. Whether you’re eating carbohydrates, fats, sugars, or proteins, all of them contain calories.
- *Caloric balance* is like a scale. To remain in balance and maintain your body weight, the calories consumed (from foods) must be balanced by the calories used (in normal body functions, daily activities, and exercise).



If you are...	Your caloric balance status is...
Maintaining your weight	<b>“in balance.”</b> You are eating roughly the same number of calories that your body is using. Your weight will remain <b>stable</b> .
Gaining weight	<b>“in caloric excess.”</b> You are eating more calories than your body is using. You will store these extra calories as fat and you’ll <b>gain</b> weight.
Losing weight	<b>“in caloric deficit.”</b> You are eating fewer calories than you are using. Your body is pulling from its fat storage cells for energy, so your weight is <b>decreasing</b> .

### HomeAm I in Caloric Balance?

If you are maintaining your current body weight, you are in caloric balance. If you need to gain weight or to lose weight, you’ll need to tip the balance scale in one direction or another to achieve your goal.

If you need to tip the balance scale in the direction of losing weight, keep in mind that **it takes approximately 3,500 calories below your calorie needs to lose a pound of body fat**. To lose about 1 to 2 pounds per week, you’ll need to reduce your caloric intake by 500—1000 calories per day.

To learn how many calories you are currently eating, begin writing down the foods you eat and the beverages you drink each day. By writing down what you eat and drink, you become more aware of everything you are putting in your mouth. Also, begin writing down the physical activity you do each day and the length of time you do it. Here are simple paper and pencil tools to assist you:

- [Food Diary \[PDF-3KB\]](#)
- [Physical Activity Diary \[PDF-42KB\]](#)

Want to try an interactive approach evaluate your food intake and physical activity? Go to the [SuperTracker](#). The site will give you a detailed assessment and analysis of your current eating and physical activity habits.

Physical activities (both daily activities and exercise) help tip the balance scale by increasing the calories you expend each day. For examples, go to [How Many Calories Does Physical Activity Burn?](#)

[Find out how many calories your body needs to maintain, lose, or gain weight by clicking here.](#)

The bottom line is... each person's body is unique and may have different caloric needs. A healthy lifestyle requires balance, in the foods you eat, in the beverages you consume, in the way you carry out your daily activities, and in the amount of physical activity or exercise you include in your daily routine. While counting calories is not necessary, it may help you in the beginning to gain an awareness of your eating habits as you strive to achieve energy balance. The ultimate test of balance is whether or not you are gaining, maintaining, or losing weight.

Research suggests that safe weight loss involves combining a reduced-calorie diet with physical activity to lose 1/2 to 2 pounds a week (after the first few weeks of weight loss). Make healthy food choices. Eat small portions. Build exercise into your daily life. Combined, these habits may be a healthy way to lose weight and keep it off. These habits may also lower your chances of developing heart disease, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes.

To review these key concepts, watch the video below:



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <http://pb.libretexts.org/dpahl/?p=68>

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