

HEALTH

Calorie Counting Tips for Divers

By Gretchen M. Ashton Sep 24, 2016

Counting calories is one of the ways we measure our fuel intake vs. our energy expenditure. Why does it matter for divers?

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We eat to stay alive, fuel our daily activities, and to heal the body. Our body is designed to enjoy the taste of food. So why do we count calories? Counting calories is one of several ways to measure how much fuel in the form of food and drink we consume and how much energy we expend through the body's metabolic processes, daily activities and exercise. Most of us either consciously or unconsciously count the calories we consume; here are a few of our best calorie counting tips for divers.

Calorie counting tips for divers

The easiest way to count calories is to use a "food counts" book. Food counts books, similar to food labels, tell us how many calories, protein, fat, carbohydrates, sodium and other nutrients are in a particular food. Some apps can provide a similar service online.

Fat has nine calories per gram while protein and carbohydrates have only four calories per gram. So based on calories alone, it seems that a diver who wants to lose body weight should avoid fat in the diet. But calories alone are not as important as the type of food. There are "good" fats like those found in avocados, for example. Some divers are already at an ideal body weight and eat to fuel exercise and sports. Long-distance runners actually rely on dietary fat for fuel to complete events that can last for hours. Divers, however, need very little fat as fuel for diving.

Limit your fats

Diving is a moderate activity, and with dives lasting less than an hour and surface-interval snacking, fat consumption of any kind is best kept to 15 percent or less of daily calories. Other macronutrient recommendations for diving are 55 percent of calories from carbohydrates and 35 percent from protein. This macronutrient combination is based on the muscle energetics of activities like sitting, walking and standing under the load of dive gear, moving around on the surface of the water and fin-kick swimming at depth. Fresh whole foods and natural lean proteins offer lots of efficient, healthy fuel. Divers can eat chicken, fish, beef, turkey, tofu and even lean pork up to four times a day. Divers can also eat unlimited quantities of vegetables and several portions of fruit each day, giving them many choices to satisfy hunger and maintain a better body composition.

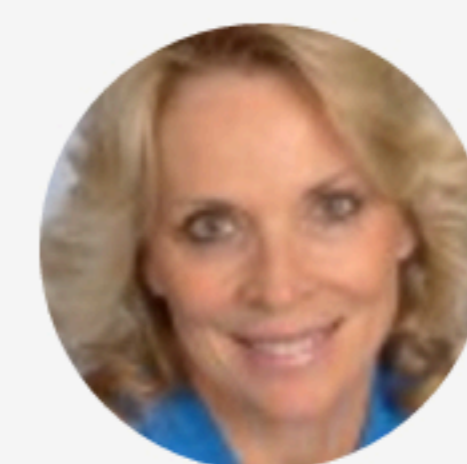
Practice mindful eating

Sometimes eating is for pleasure and food is almost always a part of celebrations. Other times, eating is mindless or because of stress and anxiety. Focus on your hunger, not boredom, to practice mindful eating. Eating small, frequent meals helps divers avoid cravings, overeating and bingeing, especially while watching television or at the movies. Remember, beverages often have more calories than foods. Soda, fancy coffees, and sports drinks are usually loaded with sugar, fats and stimulants. Eating protein first gives carbohydrates a place to land, helps regulate blood-sugar levels and makes the meal more satisfying.

How many calories do you need?

How many calories should a diver eat each day? A very general rule is to add a zero to your body weight. A diver weighing 185 pounds and planning to lose body fat might begin with a guideline of 1,850 calories as a baseline. Dives can decrease calories based on individual metabolic rate and increase calories to accommodate daily activities and exercise. Once you've determined your total daily caloric needs, structure your meal planning and portions by using calorie-counting tools or a food scale. Weighing food will help you visualize portion size and can make programmed eating easier.

Calorie counting and measuring don't work for everyone, however. Healthy eating on the fly is best for some divers who don't have time for measuring. Focusing too much on food can also represent a stumbling block. Avoiding bad fats and sugars is imperative to eating on the fly. Six small meals that include protein, fruits and vegetables spread out throughout the day will help maintain physical energy and mental acuity. New habits become part of a healthy lifestyle once a diver understands how important it is to eat foods with the highest nutritional value and the least calories. Visualizing portion sizes, paying attention to natural hunger, and eating smaller, more frequent meals are all part of a healthy lifestyle as well.



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Gretchen brings her passion for diving and fitness together as the founder of ScubaFit® the only fitness for diving certification which is also approved by both diving and fitness agencies. She is an advanced diver, NBF and ISSA Elite Personal Trainer, Specialist in Fitness Therapy and Nutrition, an AAU World Champion Hall-of-Fame athlete, and a mentor for Water Women, Inc. She shares her message with divers by visiting dive clubs, presenting at scuba shows, as a radio guest, as the publisher of FitDiver® Magazine, and with FitDiver® mobile apps. She widely published with more than 125 articles for diving publications and blogs. For more information or to contact Gretchen, visit www.scubafit.com.

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