

Ask Leyla: What's your take on low-calorie dieting for weight loss?



Q: I lost about 20 pounds counting calories. I didn't want to gain it back so I now count the calories needed not to gain it back. Now that I want to lose five more pounds, I lowered my calorie intake to lose it slowly so my body accepts it. I found calorie counting to be the only thing I've done that worked to prevent regaining the weight I lost. Your thoughts?

A: Low calorie dieting to lose weight has been a mainstay strategy in my profession for as long as I can remember. Typically, fats are discouraged due to their high calorie counts – nine calories per gram – leaving protein and carbohydrates as the featured macronutrients to choose when planning a weight loss menu.

There is no argument it definitely works, otherwise we would discourage it completely as a strategy for weight loss. However, it has its drawbacks—primarily, hunger, and more importantly, loss of lean body mass. Weight loss on a low-fat, low-calorie diet will help shed fat, but muscle will be compromised as well. And if we go too far, bone health can be adversely impacted.

This is actually a concern since the advent of GLP-1 meds like Ozempic. Yes, the issue of hunger may be resolved—as those taking these drugs report far less hunger and “food on the brain” as described by some as always thinking about the next meal

or intractable craving. But the risk of developing sarcopenia remains. Here is another dilemma: the advice to prevent muscle loss is to eat more protein and start a strength training regimen. But many of my clients taking semaglutides are unable to increase protein due to a combination of lack of hunger and/or chronic low-grade nausea.

Stay tuned next week when I'll talk about types of calories and their impact on weight loss and body composition.

To your health!

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