

Controlling Calories: Helpful Reminders

Personal Trainers consistently strive to address the goal of weight loss in many of their clients. The largest challenge is altering caloric balance. When the equation is viewed, Calories in - Calories out, it becomes very obvious that the easier of the two sides to manage is the calories in. Addressing caloric expenditure is equally important, but when running a mile burns only one hundred calories, skipping the coca-cola seems the easier of the two routes to take. Likewise the type of calories can present metabolic shifts that further complicate the problem and since most individuals maintain a positive caloric balance, weight management has become a national issue.

If personal trainers could manage their clients 24 hours a day, weight loss and goal attainment would be easy. But personal trainers only see their clients 2-3 days per week, with an average training session of 60 minutes. The reality is for most clients to reach their desired weight loss goals they must do some work on their own, which includes following behavior modification strategies. This additional work should include factors that promote increased caloric expenditure through physical activity and decreased caloric intake through improved dietary habits. Identifying the areas that present the greatest barriers warrants particular effort in both dissemination and education to reduce the impact the behaviors have on the outcomes of the personal training program. Trainers must point out the areas of concern and provide methods which serve avoid or prevent the pitfalls, thereby vastly improving the likelihood of goal attainment.

1. Plan and prepare food (make less food) – When preparing food for meals at home, it is relevant to pay close attention to the amount of food that is being prepared versus the actual amount of calories required for energy. People generally eat what is cooked. Toward the end of any meal it is not uncommon to hear “Don’t let it go to waste” or “There’s just a little more left”. Everyone feels some level of guilt throwing food away and unless the remaining portion is of substantial magnitude, saving it as leftovers is not the common outcome. However, if the amount of food that is actually prepared is of proper proportion and appropriate for the number of consumers then the calories are easily managed and over consumption does not occur. The number one contributor to weight gain is overeating.
2. Avoid eating out – For many individuals, this can be difficult to avoid. Due to work-related functions, tendencies for convenience, real or perceived lack of time, or family/social gatherings, many individuals find themselves in a restaurant-type setting 3-4 times per week. The problems with eating out include the large portion size, the inability to control how the food is prepared, hidden and large quantities of calories, and the increased likelihood of social eating (“I’ll get dessert if you do”). These factors all contribute to increased caloric intake. Individuals who consume their meals at restaurants or use drive-thru fast food chains are likely to over-consume calories without intention. It is very difficult to eat out and create a negative caloric balance.

3. Don't fill the plate (smaller portions) – Portion control cannot be emphasized enough. The old adage that many grew up hearing over and over again was “make sure you clean your plate.” That advice has created a mentality that whatever is placed on a dish is an appropriate amount of food (calories) and should therefore be consumed in one sitting. Keep this in mind when you are serving yourself in buffet-style meals. Do not fill your plate on the first go around. More often than not a feeling of fullness will set in after the first serving, and seconds are not necessary. Make getting more calories inconvenient. If you are truly hungry, you'll make the effort.
4. Set portions (do not take the whole bag or box) – Learn the serving sizes and measure them out so you have a better idea of the calories being consumed by portion. Oftentimes consumers take the entire bag or box that the food comes in with them to watch TV or work on the computer rather than measure out food and use a bowl or plate. In some cases the entire package gets consumed due to proximity eating without any governance. The outcome is the consumption of excess servings, and therefore 2-4 times as many calories. This is typical with a box of cookies or a bag of chips. Developing a complete understanding of serving size and paying close attention to the serving size from every package regardless of portion consumed will help identify the calories being consumed which should lead to better decision making and lead to better weight management. When individuals are oblivious to the total calories consumed, there are no internal controls to shut off the eating except becoming over-full.
5. Use smaller dishes and/or bowls – How do you decide how much cereal to eat in the morning? If you're like most people, you simply fill up the cereal bowl. However, the food label on the side of the box clearly states that the serving size is either $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup or 1 cup. Next time you fill up your bowl with cereal, take a minute to measure the amount of cereal in a measuring cup. You will most likely see that much more than 1 serving is being consumed, and therefore the proportion of calories being consumed parallels the portion size. By using smaller plates/bowls, it will appear that you are consuming more and proper serving sizes will be consumed. Research has shown that people consume less food and drink when the serving containers are smaller.
6. Eat before going out – If going out and finding yourself at a social gathering where food and drink is unavoidable, many calories can be cut from your consumption at the event by eating before you leave the house. Consuming a moderate, calorie controlled meal or snack that you have prepared at home will reduce hunger and consequential appetite which often causes one to splurge on the many appealing food and drink selections at social gatherings or on today's menus. As mentioned earlier, eating out can greatly increase the number of calories consumed because of the social mentality, lack of influence in preparation, and an inadvertent disregard for portion size.

7. Snack on fruits and vegetables – Simply replacing typically unhealthy snack foods such as cookies, candies, and pastries with more nutrient-dense foods such as fruits and vegetables can help calorie control. Whole fruits and vegetables are low in calorie by weight. Due to the increased water and fiber content of many fruits and vegetables, and the increased amount of complex carbohydrates, the digestive process takes longer to breakdown fruits and vegetables. In addition, consumption of these healthier alternative snacks will lead to an increased feeling of satiety, and therefore a decreased likelihood of continued calorie consumption. Replace that candy bar at 3pm with an apple and you have decreased the calories consumed from 210 to approximately 75, while adding fiber and vitamins.
8. Focus on fiber intake – By focusing on fiber intake and making a conscious effort to consume the recommended 20-35 grams of fiber per day, individuals will likely eat healthier foods that will increase their level of fullness. Foods that are primarily comprised of complex carbohydrates, such as whole grain oats, pastas, and breads will increase fiber intake. The slower breakdown of the carbohydrates in fiber rich food reduces the absorption rate and insulin response, thereby preventing hyperinsulinemia and lipid anabolism.
9. Avoid convenience eating – Eating certain foods because they require minimal preparation or because of close proximity often leads to unhealthy eating patterns and excess calorie consumption. Most will agree that pulling into a drive-thru is certainly more convenient than driving to the grocery store, shopping for fresh products, and going home to prepare a meal. Although the latter is the healthier alternative, fast food offers the convenience and time-saving alternative that many people feel is necessary to allow for their busy schedules. Likewise, grabbing energy bars and related snack foods add large calories by volume. Processed convenient foods do not curb hunger for long periods of time even though the calories are often relatively high.
10. Be conscious of drinking calories – Food is not the only thing that contains calories. Surprisingly many people fail to report on daily food logs calories that are consumed through drink. Other than water or diet beverages, most drinks contain calories, often from sugar, some an astonishingly large amount. Morning juice drinks contain between 100-200 calories per 8 oz. serving. A 12 oz. can of soda contains at least 150 calories. Even drinks that are typically consumed at the gym such as Gatorade or Powerade contain approximately 50-80 calories per serving from sugar and the individual size bottles often reflect 2-3 servings. Ignoring calories that are consumed through drinks can lead to an under prediction of total calories consumed per day by as much as 500-700 calories. Achieving any weight loss goal by neglecting an extra 500-700 consumed calories per day will be nearly impossible.
11. Moderate alcohol consumption – Similar to the previous reminder about drink calories, alcohol consumption can quickly lead to increased caloric intake. Alcoholic beverages such as wine and beer contain approximately 90-180 calories

per serving. The majority of liquors contain fewer calories per serving, but the mixers used are often high in sugar. Oftentimes liquor is combined with soda or juice and the total calorie content of one mixed drink now can approach 200-400 calories. Moderate consumption of alcohol will positively influence total caloric intake and help achieve any weight management goal. Additionally, alcohol increases the likelihood of fat storage due to preferred metabolism.

12. Shop from a list – Having a structured plan when entering a grocery store is important. Unfortunately, grocery stores are not designed to help the healthy shopper. Many of the traditional “impulse buy” products such as cookies, candies, and other high sugar, high calorie foods are often on special and placed at the ends of each aisle or at eye level within each aisle. Having a list of items that are needed and sticking to that list will prevent the purchase of unnecessary items. Those unnecessary items are most likely unhealthy snacks that will lead to increased calorie consumption.

These 12 reminders should be a part of every trainer’s educational services provided to their clients. Each recommendation can help reduce total caloric intake. The reminders are also important for preventing any unwanted weight gain. Practicing calorie control is not easy. Personal trainers should constantly work to support their clients in making healthier lifestyle choices and understanding the importance of calories as well as where they come from. Unfortunately, consuming calories is far easier than expending calories. Providing concrete examples of calories in vs. calories out is a good way for clients to understand this concept. Many individuals will eliminate a soda when they find out that simply drinking a 12 oz can (which contains approximately 150 calories) is equivalent to jogging 1.5 miles. Accounting for the 150 calories of a soda by jogging 1.5 miles certainly seems more difficult than just not drinking the soda in the first place. The use of these friendly reminders should help all trainers achieve the weight management goals of their clients.