

Preserving Muscle Mass during Your Weight Loss Journey

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To lose weight, you need to create a calorie deficit by eating fewer calories or increasing the number of calories you burn through physical activity or both.

In general, you need to decrease your caloric intake by 500 to 700 calories a day to lose 0.5 to 1 kilogram a week. If you can add some physical activity to your day, you will be able to accomplish your weight-loss goals even faster.

It sounds simple; however, it is much more complex than it sounds, because when you lose weight, you usually lose a combination of fat, lean mass, and water. Studies have shown that if you achieve a caloric deficit to lose weight solely by cutting calories, you are probably going to lose a quarter of your weight loss from muscle mass [1].

Since muscle burns more calories than fat, having less of it slows down your metabolism, making it even harder to lose weight. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to minimize muscle loss.

Cut fewer calories

Obviously, if just cutting calories is going to result in so much muscle loss, you need to think about going gradual on lowering your caloric intake. In general, a female should reduce calories by about 300 to 400 calories and males about 400 to 600 calories. A small caloric deficit will help you lose weight slowly, which will help reduce the amount of muscle mass that you lose [2].

Increase your protein intake

One of the first things you should do if you're trying to lose fat without compromising existing muscle is boost your daily protein intake.

Studies have shown that high protein intake (1.25 to 1.5) grams per kilograms of weight per day is recommended for a person who is undergoing weight-loss to limit the loss of muscle mass; this amount can maximize fat loss while maintaining existing muscle [3].

As an example, a 70 kilograms individual would need to consume between 88 and 105 grams of proteins per day (70x1.25 – 70x1.5)

Perform total-body strength training

Several studies found that performing regular resistance exercise can help you maintain and even gain muscles while decreasing fat mass. Resistance training breaks your muscles down, which stimulates a process known as muscle protein synthesis or the repair of muscles. And by having enough protein, this repair process helps your muscles heal and grow bigger and stronger [4].

General guidelines suggest adults should strength train two to three times a week at a moderate to high intensity. To make the most of your weight training routine, start with light weights until you master the correct form. Then increase the weight slowly to avoid injury. Be sure to work all your muscle groups for optimal strength and fitness.

Don't overdo Cardio training

You might think that working out for an hour every day on the elliptical is the way to burn your body fat when you're dieting. In fact, this is not the right way. Unlike weight lifting, which helps you build and maintain your muscle mass, overdoing cardio doesn't build muscle; on the contrary, it can burn it. In one study, it was proven that when combining calorie restriction with a moderate intensity cardio exercise for more than 60 minutes per day resulted in a decreased muscle mass [5].

References

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