



MARCH 16th to MARCH 22nd 2007



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vocento

Health And Beauty**An inactive diet**

David Gallego

If we spend the entire day sitting in front of a computer screen or in an office, what and how experts tell us to cut down on calories but not the proportion of fats

ONE of the principal obsessions of our society is eating well and leading a healthy life, which means eating healthy food and doing some exercise every day. We all know the benefits to be few of us have the willpower to match intention with accomplishment. Most of us sit in offices or in front of screens for many hours each day, or spend long periods in the car or on public transport, doing little or no exercise. But we keep eating at more or less the same rate as before. This leads to more calories we consume and those we burn up through exercise.

We are advised by experts in the World Health Organisation to exercise for at least half an hour a day to stay minimally fit, but the answer lies partly in the food we eat. If we find ourselves leading an inactive life, what exactly should we eat? "It is always important to maintain a certain equilibrium in the nutrients we consume," says the director of the Institute of Nutrition and Food Technology in the University of Granada, Victoria Muñoz. If we do little or nothing in the way of exercise, the types of nutrients our organs need are the same, and in equal proportion. "one should only vary the consumption of calories that are needed for the activities one does," says this specialist.

This equilibrium in the nutrients we consume means that the carbohydrates should make up more than half of the food we eat – approximately 55 per cent of our diet – while fats should make up between 20 and 30 per cent, according to the recommendations in the "Dietary Guide for Americans," quoted by the Spanish Nutrition Society. The remaining percentage should be made up of proteins.

In line with activity

Jerónimo García Romero, a specialist in Physical Education and Sports Medicine in the University of Granada, recommends that we increase the proportion of proteins in our diet as long as we do rigorous exercise. "we should not go overboard on this: in most cases, we consume more proteins than we need."

In the same way, occupations that require more physical exercise also require the intake of more calories. "If we have a sufficiently varied diet, there is no need for supplementary elements nor extra vitamins, unless advised by a doctor," says García Romero.

For the average sedentary adult, therefore, the number of kilocalories burned would be approximately 2,000 for men, and 1,200 for women. These figures rise by about 20 per cent in the case of people who do regular exercise, and 30 per cent for very active people, we are told by Martínez de Victoria Muñoz.

Exercise

The barometer for establishing the level of activity needed by each individual can be easily ascertained by the time and type he or she does every day. A person is considered to lead a sedentary life if he or she spends more than four hours each day on any activity requiring physical activity, such as walking, for example. "In any case, if we move at a reasonable pace, without stopping for rests, and not simply strolling along," says Martínez de Victoria Muñoz, a reasonable pace means four of five kilometres per hour, we are told by the specialists.

A person who does what the experts describe as 'moderate activity' is one who exercises for at least 30 minutes a day, and a person described as 'active' will be practicing some active sport at least three times a week for at least an hour. And finally, a 'very active' person is a top athlete, training intensively each week in high-level competitions every week.

Calorie usage

Whatever category a person fits into, his daily calorie needs vary according to the level of activity. This is not easy to measure. Although there are a number of charts we can consult (one on the previous page), that will allow us to make a good guess, says the Professor of Medicine at Malaga University, Dr. José María Fernández. Nevertheless, the data we come up with as a result of such calculations should be taken with a grain of salt, given that the final number of calories we burn each day must take other factors into account, such as the exercise we do and the circumstances in which we do them.

Besides, these charts must also take each person's weight into account, because this plays a role in the rate at which calories are burned up. Obviously, a heavy person has to move more weight than a lighter person when doing any kind of physical exercise. And we must also remember that a person uses up a large amount of energy generating heat, known as basal metabolism, which is also at a higher level in heavier people. Simply put, the more body surface a person has, the more heat generated.

Basal metabolism also depends to a large extent on climate. The human body uses more energy in cold climates where it takes more effort to maintain oneself in optimum condition. In fact, people lose an extra amount of their energy in hot climates over the amount lost in moderate climates.

Eating and exercise

One's diet should be linked to one's level of activity. These are the different levels of each:

Levels of activity

Scant activity: Less than an hour a day of moderate exercise, such as walking at a reasonable speed.

Moderate activity: A full hour daily of moderate physical activity.

Intense activity: At least an hour each day doing moderate physical exercise, as well as the same amount of intense weekly activity.

Very intense activity: Daily sessions of intense physical exercise, as well as weekly competitive sports.

The food pyramid

Carbohydrates: They should make up more than half the nutrients we consume daily, amounting to 55 to 65 per cent. We should also increase this amount when doing resistance activities.

Fats: They should make up from 20 to 35 per cent of our daily intake.

Proteins: They should make up between ten and 25 per cent of the total intake. This amount should be increased when doing more intense physical exercise.

Other factors

Weight: The heavier we are, the more calories we burn.

Climate: The hotter it is, the more calories we use.

The key to beginning exercise

Physical exercise is fundamental in maintaining oneself in a healthy physical condition. Before starting a physical training programme, it is necessary to know that one's body is already in a good enough condition to exercise in an unaccustomed manner. Any kind of health condition can be dangerous, from a heart problem to other illness we might suffer. And it is important to always see a doctor before planning unaccustomed exercise on a regular basis. We must also remember that the consumption of medicines can have a serious effect on the body. When starting exercise, we are told by the specialist in Physical Education and Sports Medicine at the University of Malaga, Dr. Jerónimo García.

With physical exercise, resistance is achieved by low-intensity activity, while strength is acquired by working the muscles.