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# HEALTHY CHOICES FOR MIND AND BODY

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## QUESTIONS FROM READERS: CALORIES, PROTEIN & WEIGHT

(10/2005)

Q: I enjoyed your latest newsletter and the formulas for calculating caloric needs. Where did you get this formula and does the body weight calculation include 5 pounds of clothing? If so, then my ideal body weight is 22 pounds more than my current weight. Alan, from Kansas

A: The formulas for calculating energy needs are variations of the Harris-Benedict formula, derived years ago and variously validated or condemned since then. There are 280 other formulas in the nutrition literature, so clearly the 'experts' disagree on which works best. I changed the original formula from kilograms and centimeters to pounds and inches, then rounded off the multipliers. **Calorie calculations are gross estimates** anyway, and almost everyone does a poor job of estimating the calories they eat. I tweaked the original Harris-Benedict formula by substituting ideal weight for actual weight. We should calculate and eat the number of calories that moves us toward the ideal, rather than whatever shape currently exists, if not ideal.

If your estimated ideal body weight does not fit your preconceived idea: First **re-measure your height** to make sure you use your actual height rather than a delusional number, for the calculation. Most people over 35 shrink with aging, most commonly from progressive squashing of discs in the spine.

Please recognize that the **ideal body weight formula gives a middle number for an appropriate range of ideal weight** for a given height. Individuals with a narrow torso, small bones and/or difficulty building muscle should weigh less. Others, with broad, stocky frames, who make muscle by just turning over in bed, should naturally and healthfully weigh more. Ideal body weight does NOT include 5 pounds of clothing, shoes, or a towel. Weigh naked. Even the weight in the doctor's office is not accurate if you don't weigh without clothes.

Q: Is there anything bad about protein? You wrote that we normally get too much but I wasn't sure if that was bad for some reason. Enlighten me! Tricia, from Texas

Protein in and of itself is not bad. Eating more protein than a person needs either displaces other healthy food from the diet or adds excess calories. In people with kidney disease or diabetes, excess protein of any type may accelerate the decline of kidney function. Animal protein foods (meat, poultry and full-fat dairy) contain saturated fat, which raise LDL-cholesterol levels, contributing to heart disease. Meat raises uric acid levels, which can cause gout and damage kidneys.