



PUMP IT UP

Learn how to crank up your metabolism

by Colleen Braganza

WE'VE ALL heard about metabolism but no one can really define it. We also vaguely know we will benefit if we increase it, but don't know exactly how. Here's a lowdown on metabolism.

WHAT IS METABOLISM?

Metabolism is a set of constant processes that keeps the body going during activity, rest or sleep. "It is the power of the body to convert any resource - plant, animal, oilseeds or water - into human energy or life energy," says nutritionist Shikha Sharma. "The efficiency with which the body does this determines your metabolic rate."

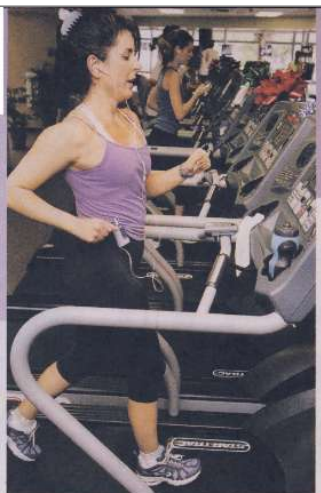
The process of metabolism not only converts food into energy, but maintains and repairs the body and eliminates toxins. So you can think of metabolism as the maintenance or housekeeping department in a busy office that runs 24 hours. Simply put, the body will collapse without metabolic processes.

HOW TO INCREASE IT

Though your genes determine your metabolic rate, it is possible for you to increase it. By that we mean, you can crank up your body to consume more energy at all times - at rest or during activity. This especially helps people keen on losing weight. There are three ways to do that:

EXERCISE REGULARLY: "Any activity done regularly helps increase the metabolic rate," says fitness consultant Vesna Jacobs. "When you spend a little bit of energy regularly, throughout the day, it gives best results. That is better than killing yourself at the gym for two hours. So do something for 10 minutes every hour." Besides aerobic exercise, make it a point to do weights at least thrice a week because that strengthens muscles which consume more energy than lean tissue or fat.

EAT WELL, EAT RIGHT: Nutritionist Shikha Sharma says you must eat food that doesn't overload the liver, the organ responsible for processing fatty food. "If the liver functions efficiently, your metabolism can increase. The less load on it, the better it works," she says. So avoid oily and fatty food and opt for dalia, brown rice poha, chana chaat and lobia chaat. "Drinking clean water



KEEP MOVING

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Regular activity helps increase the metabolic rate

is also important," she says.

As we breathe or rest or digest food, we burn calories. We can also increase metabolism by eating food that the body takes more energy to digest. "Avoid simple carbohydrates like sugars and white flour that don't need to be broken down by the body and go for complex carbohydrates instead. Sprouts, lettuce and sprouted rye bread are particularly good," suggests Vesna.

Dietician Sharon Arora of the GM Modi Hospital agrees. "Eat food with lots of fibre because the body uses more energy to digest that. Fruits with fibre like mosambi, oranges and pear are good," she says.



AGE EFFECT

Fitness consultant Vesna Jacobs says your metabolism is dependent on three factors: age, how active your thyroid gland is and hormonal levels, especially among women who suffer more hormonal changes than men. Age is an important factor because as you grow older, your metabolic rate drops. "After the age of 30, your basal metabolic rate goes down by 5-10 per cent," says Ritika Samaddar, chief dietician at Max Hospital, Saket.

EAT ON TIME:

This is crucial. Experts say when you skip a meal and deny your body food, it goes into starvation mode and deliberately uses less energy for its daily 'maintenance' tasks because it is unsure if it will get food energy regularly. This results in lower metabolism that hampers weight loss. This is also why many dieters find that their best efforts at dieting never show any results. "Don't skip meals, especially breakfast. People who have regular meals have a higher metabolic rate than people who skip," says Ritika Samaddar, chief dietician at Max Hospital, Saket.

Also have smaller meals 5-6 times a day. The body needs energy every 3-3 1/2 hours. If you give your body a little energy when it needs it, you are giving it a signal that you are not starving it. So it decides it won't be stingy about using energy and after using the energy you have given it, it reaches inside the fat deposits and takes energy from there too. But you have to be careful of the quantity you eat. It's a fine balance," says Vesna.

"When you eat and exercise regularly, your body starts working at an elevated rate. It then burns more when you are doing nothing and that continues through the day," she adds.

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