

How your diet prescription outsmarts your genes

Nobody likes to admit it, but the fact remains: Your body wants to store fat. It's good at it, too. Storing fat is a survival mechanism passed down through your genes from your prehistoric ancestors, when the food supply was unpredictable. Long before there were all-night buffets and convenience stores, people who could store fat well were the ones who survived — and in order to store fat, they had to eat more than their bodies burned.

Today, our bodies still want to store fat, so in subtle ways our bodies tell us to eat more calories than we can burn. In fact, many of us habitually overindulge. An estimated two-thirds of adult Americans are now overweight or obese. To lose weight, we have to learn to control our thoughts and actions so that we eat fewer calories than our body uses.

Sounds daunting, doesn't it? Don't worry. Our prescription weight-loss program allows for safe weight loss under medical supervision. The trained staff at our center is experienced in teaching patients what they need to know to lose weight and keep it off.

The success of our program lies in the combination of three effective weight-loss strategies: eating frequent, small meals; consuming an appropriate balance of protein, carbohydrates and fats; and restricting calories.

Frequent small meals

Eating five to seven frequent small meals — or mini-meals, as we like to call them — throughout the day keeps your metabolism humming, more efficiently burning fat stores and avoiding wild fluctuations in blood sugar and insulin levels.

We recognize that this is not our usual cultural pattern of eating. You may need a reminder. Try a timer or set your digital watch or phone to alert you when it's time to eat.

Your metabolism is your fat-burning engine, and it's important to fire up the engine within the first hour after you awaken. This means you need to eat breakfast even if you're not hungry. Follow this with another mini-meal every two to three hours. Try not to go longer than three hours between meals or your metabolism will slow down. The longer between meals, the more your body will try to store fat, not lose it.

Restricting calories

To lose fat, you have to force your body to use its own fat stores for energy. To do this, you must eat fewer calories than the body burns every day.

The problem arises when your body, realizing that it is getting less food and using up its stored energy (fat), responds by slowing down its metabolism, or the rate at which it burns calories. You can blame those ancestral genes for this, too.

To minimize this inevitable slowing of your metabolism, the Monarch program combines calorie cutting with two additional strategies.

Balanced nutrients

Your body needs high quality, balanced, nutritious food. Eating the right balance of nutrients now is critical for maintaining muscle mass while losing fat, and maintaining a healthy weight later.

All foods contain one or more of four types of macronutrients, each containing 4 to 9 calories (kcal) per gram: protein (4 kcal/gram), carbohydrates (4 kcal/gram), fat (9 kcal/gram) and alcohol (7 kcal/gram).

Carbohydrates are rapidly turned into blood sugar, also known as glucose, one of the fuels for your body. Rising levels of glucose also cause a rise, or spike, in insulin levels in your bloodstream. Insulin spikes and high insulin levels are part of the process that leads to obesity and many obesity-related diseases. It will also be helpful to learn how the different forms of carbohydrates are metabolized and how quickly they can raise your blood sugar and insulin levels.

Protein has many benefits, such as staving off hunger, or prolonging satiety, helping keep blood sugar and insulin at more consistent levels and helping to preserve lean body mass. Protein can also be used as a fuel, but it does not contribute to the wild glucose and insulin spikes caused by carbohydrates. These glucose and insulin spikes contribute to a sequence of events that stimulate fat storage. Our bodies need a certain amount of protein daily to maintain muscle mass. Otherwise your body will steal what it needs from your muscles for energy. Your customized diet prescription is calculated to provide the minimum amount of protein you should eat each day to prevent loss of important muscle mass.

So what should you eat? You should eat a balanced combination of all the macronutrients. By balanced, we mean that the grams of protein are equal to or greater than the grams of carbohydrate contained in each meal or mini-meal.

For most patients, it takes practice to learn what combination of foods will meet their prescription's mini-meal protein requirement and calorie limit. With limits on calories, getting the most nutritional "bang out of every bite" becomes essential. Because what and how much you eat are so critical to your weight loss success and ultimately good health, the clinic has chosen to offer nutrition-packed meal replacement products with the optimal amounts of protein and carbohydrate in the Monarch Nutrition Center. These foods can be used as mini-meals and in combination with grocery store foods for your single, larger meal. Need help planning meals or mini-meals? Ask the center staff.

We know how hard it can be to adapt to a healthier, more balanced approach to food. Changing your lifestyle isn't easy either. But together, we can beat those ancestral genes.

Monarch's Principles of Weight Loss

1. Eat frequent, small "mini-meals" every two to three hours throughout the day. This will keep your metabolism humming and prevent your insulin from spiking. This will also help activate your body's own fat-burning processes.
2. Eat enough protein to protect your muscles, and balance the ratio of proteins to carbohydrates in each mini-meal. This will help you feel less hungry between mini-meals.
3. Burn more calories than you eat. Be active and stay disciplined about your prescription diet plan.

Follow these principles and experience your transformation!

