

10 Small Tips to Lose a Big Belly

The simple, smart choices you make each day really do add up—like choosing bottled water over sugar-filled pop, fresh berries instead of ice cream for dessert, whole-grain versus white bread or a small, non-fat latté over a large one made with full-fat milk.

Make it “Splurge-Worthy”

When you get the urge to splurge on calorie-laden indulgences (and we all do!), rate the indulgent food on a scale of 1 to 10. If it isn't a 9 or 10, don't bother—it's not worthy! There's nothing worse than having to loosen your belt after eating a food that you didn't really enjoy. Talk about wasting calories!

You Booze, You Lose!

Actually, you don't lose! It's not just the empty calorie wallop from alcohol that makes your behind wider; it's the alcohol itself. A mere three ounces of alcohol can reduce the body's ability to burn fat by one-third! Holy Brown Cow! Alcohol, even if “low carb,” still raises blood sugar, stimulating insulin, the powerful fat-storage hormone. And it bogs down your liver, which is directly involved in fat metabolism. So drinking makes your liverwurst and your beer belly even worse!

Chill Out or Fill Out

When you're under stress, the hormones cortisol and adrenaline rise. These stress hormones make us hungry, especially for sweets. No wonder “stressed” spelled backwards is “desserts!” These hormones also encourage your body to store fat around the middle, so ongoing stress can lead to a flabby abdomen—a

flabdomen! Massage, deep breathing, yoga, listening to music, even laughing are good ways to turn off the cortisol tap.

Go Graze!

It's important to never let your tank run dry. Aim for smaller, more frequent meals (250-500 calories per meal, every three hours or so) to keep your metabolism (your calorie-burning furnace) stoked and your blood sugar even-stein. Another good point: Studies suggest that exceeding 500 calories at any meal makes it easier for your body to store the excess calories as fat. So, do not exceed the feed limit!

Yank Your Sweet Tooth

Sugar is your waistline's worst enemy. It raises insulin (the fat-storage hormone) and it's easily converted into fat—the type of fat that usually ends up around your middle! Plus, it's an anti-nutrient—it takes away from your body, depleting it of nutrients, rather than contributing anything to it. The more sugar you eat, the more you crave. So try an experiment: For two weeks, eat nothing sweet. (You can have two pieces of fruit per day, but NOTHING else sweet. Watch the flab melt off your waist, almost like magic—Flabra-cadabra!

Join the Breakfast Club

Studies show that breakfast eaters are thinner, smarter, and nicer to be around! A hearty, healthy, high-fiber breakfast like oatmeal, fruit, whole-grain toast or whole-grain cereal does more than keep your brain cells, blood sugar and relationships operating smoothly. It also jump-starts your metabolism, so you'll start burning fat and calories right out of the gate. Plus, eating breakfast prevents overeating at lunchtime. If you skipped breakfast, chances are you'll be so famished at lunchtime you'll snort down three McHappy Meals without a second thought. And that's McSad.

Follow the 80/20 Rule

Try this: 80 percent of the time, choose foods that are nutritious—high in fiber, good fats, unprocessed, natural foods—and 20 percent of the time, have whatever it is you're craving. If you must have that cheesecake, have a small piece, enjoy every mouthful, and then get back on the healthy eating track for the rest of the day. It's not every morsel you eat that's important; it's what you do consistently, over the long haul that matters most.

Show Some Flex Appeal

Muscle is a calorie-zapping machine—a fat-burning furnace. For each pound of muscle you gain, you'll burn an extra 50 calories per day just to maintain it. The more muscle you have, the more fat you'll incinerate 24 hours a day, even while sleeping! So the more muscle you have, the more you can eat, as well! That's reason enough for us to pick up a dumbbell. (And we're not talking about Internet dating here, either!)

Avoid Pop-o-matic Trouble

Be careful with diet sodas. People who drink beverages loaded with artificial sweeteners may actually develop cravings for real sugar, leading them to overeat. Plus, artificial sweeteners stimulate insulin, the dreaded fat-storage hormone, just like real sugar does. And they suppress the hormone leptin, which controls appetite. Sure seems like diet sodas might help you GAIN weight! Ouch! If you're a soda-holic, limit yourself to one per day, or better yet, switch to lemon and water or cranberry juice and water.

Keep It Light at Night

Put a "closed" sign on your kitchen door at about 7:30 pm. You might be shocked to find out how many calories you absentmindedly nibble or chug while watching TV, surfing the net, helping kids with homework, or just puttering around. And you don't have a chance to burn off those needless calories,

either. Plus, this kitchen curfew gives your liver a break from digestion duties so it can concentrate on more important tasks (like restoring and detoxifying your body) during the night.

Janet and Greta Podleski have co-authored three cookbooks, including *Eat, Shrink and Be Merry*, which became an inspiration for a television show on the Food Network of the same name and hosted by the two sisters.

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