

On your next visit to the gym, take a look around. Although there might be a lot of big guys around, you'll notice that a quality physique is hard to find. A combination of impressive muscularity and low body fat is the exception rather than the rule. However, the rarity of a 'six-pack' testifies to the difficulty (or most commonly lack of know-how) involved in actually getting one. It takes effort, self-discipline and an effective training and nutrition programme to drop your body fat percentage into single digits. It's a fact that a leaner body with less fat makes you appear harder and more muscular. A 13-stone man with 10% body fat will look far more impressive than a 14-stone man with 18% body fat. You'll be healthier as well.

1. Bin the junk food!

Start taking out all the junk foods (i.e. crisps, desserts, chocolate bars and other things) that you know you shouldn't have been eating in the first place. When you're not getting the results you expect, the usual culprit is diet. If you're not eating the foods you should be (and avoiding the ones you shouldn't) you're not going to see the results you want - no matter how hard or how often you train. The fact is that "hidden" calories in your diet can easily put the brakes on your progress. Condiments, fruit juice, fizzy drinks, pastas, breads and salad dressings all quickly add up. Let's take a can of Coca Cola or Pepsi as an example. While one drink doesn't seem like much, it can make all the difference. Depending on the type of drink you choose, one can of Coke contains around 150 calories. To burn off those calories in the gym (using aerobic exercise such as jogging, cycling or stepping at 70-80% of your maximum heart rate) would take you at least 30 minutes!

2. Eat healthy fats

Certain types of fat can accelerate weight loss. Fat has long been considered the 'bad-boy' of nutrition by ill-informed nutritionists and the media. However, the long-chain omega-3 fatty acids (such as those found in salmon, sardines or tuna) have been shown to accelerate fat loss [4]. Make sure to include these essential fats in your diet on a regular basis. Several other sources of healthy fat include extra-virgin olive oil, flaxseed, and avocados.

3. Avoid carbohydrate drinks before and during exercise

Carbohydrates consumed before or during exercise will reduce the amount of fat burned for energy [3]. Instead of breaking down stored body fat, your body will burn the carbohydrate in your drink. This doesn't mean that you should avoid carbohydrate drinks altogether. There's plenty of research to show they can enhance performance during endurance exercise. But if

you want to lose fat, carbohydrate drinks will slow your progress. Drink water to avoid dehydration and avoid the high-calorie energy drinks.

4. Prepare your own food

Start preparing your own meals rather than eating out. This should be easy during the work week, but try to stick to it on the weekends as much as possible as well. If you don't have time, or you can't be bothered to cook for yourself, try using a meal replacement supplement, such as a Promax Meal bar (Maximuscle) or Metraplex 790 (ABB Foods). Meal replacements are like taking a shopping basket full of food, and extracting the lean protein, vitamins, minerals and fibre - and putting it all in one place. They give you all the convenience of fast food without the excess calories, saturated fat and unhealthy sugars.

5. Eat protein with each meal

Regular protein intake is a vital part of any fat loss programme. It increases your metabolic rate, satisfies the appetite and preserves muscle mass. Research shows that a diet containing approximately 40% carbohydrate, 30-40% protein and 20-30% fat works better for fat loss compared to the high-carbohydrate, low-fat diet. You'll have more energy and won't feel so stuffed, bloated and lethargic. Your body will also receive a constant supply of the nutrients it needs to recover and grow.

One form of protein that's especially beneficial is whey protein. Not only can whey help you build muscle faster, it can also help with appetite control [1]. Scientists believe this may be caused by effect of whey on cholecystokinin (CCK). CCK, dubbed by some the "feel full" hormone, works in several ways. Firstly, it acts on nerves in the lining of your stomach, telling your brain that your stomach is full. It also slows the movement of food from your stomach so you feel full for longer.

There's also some animal research to show that whey aids fat loss [5]. Researchers took groups of rats and made them exercise 2 hours daily for 5 weeks, either on an empty stomach or one hour after they ingested a meal enriched with sugar (glucose), whole milk protein or whey protein. The rats fed the whole milk or whey protein burned the same amount of fat as those who exercised on an empty stomach. Five weeks later, the groups were measured again. Those fed the high sugar or the whole milk diet gained body fat. Although the whey group also gained weight, it was found to be extra muscle mass. What's more, the rats fed whey also experienced a decrease in body fat.

Whey is also rich in branched-chain amino acids (BCAA), which have been shown to accelerate fat loss and aid muscle retention [2]. In the study, a group of wrestlers was assigned to one of four groups; low-calorie diet only, low-calorie, high-protein diet, low-calorie, high-BCAA diet, low-calorie, low-protein diet. The results show that wrestlers in the high-BCAA group lost the most fat and retained the most muscle.

Although there are many different types of whey protein on the market, I recommend that you use a high-quality whey protein such as Promax by Maximuscle.

References

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