WHAT WE'RE READING...

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NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.

9 Foods That May Increase Metabolism

It can be tempting to blame your metabolism for weight gain and other health problems. Although your metabolism influences your body's energy needs, your digestive fire and physical activity, the foods you eat actually determine your weight and overall health.

There are some foods that may increase your metabolism because they contain important elements that are vital to maintain a steady metabolism, they take more calories to break down in the digestive system, or they contain protein. But before we get to those foods, let's take a step back and go over what metabolism is in detail.

What Is Metabolism?

Metabolism is a process that involves biochemical and hormone reactions by which your body converts everything you eat and drink into energy. During this complex process, calories in nutrients are combined with other elements like oxygen to release the energy that keeps the systems, organs, and cells working in optimal order.

Metabolism can be divided into two categories:

- **Anabolism:** This phase involves the synthesis of all compounds needed by the cells.
- **Catabolism:** This phase is the breakdown of molecules to obtain energy.

Basal Metabolic Rate

When someone says they have slow metabolism, what they actually mean is that they have a low basal metabolic rate (BMR). This term refers to the minimum energy it takes your body to burn the maximum calories. In other words, it's the amount of energy your body uses to carry out its basic functions like heart beating, circulating blood, releasing hormones, breathing, growing and repairing cells, and all cell functions.

Your BMR accounts for about 70 percent of the calories you burn each day, according to the Mayo Clinic.

BMR depends on several factors:

- **Age:** For many, metabolism decreases 5 percent each decade after the age of 40. This is due to a loss in muscle mass. Muscle takes more energy to properly function, so it burns calories faster than fat or any other tissue.
- **Gender:** Men usually have more muscle mass than women, and therefore BMR is generally higher for men. Since women generally have less muscle mass, fat deposits tend to stay in the body longer, especially after the childbearing years.

- **Heredity:** The way your metabolism works may be in your genes. Every function in your body is determined by your genes, including basal metabolism. The expression of those genes, like the rate in which your body burns fat, may be inherited; which means that it may run in your family.
- **Body size and composition:** People with a larger body mass burn calories faster.

In addition to BMR, other factors determine the way your body metabolizes food and burns calories:

- **Digestion:** Absorption and transportation, food processing, and even storage burn calories. If you have a healthy digestive system, or a powerful agni (the digestive fire, as it's known in Ayurveda), digestion usually requires a steady amount of calories.
- **Physical activity and exercise:** All of your body's movement accounts for the rest of the calories it burns on a daily basis. This includes exercise, but even doing things like texting requires energy.

Although there are some medical conditions that can slow BMR, like digestive syndromes or thyroid diseases, weight gain rarely depends solely on slow BMR.

Essential Nutrients and a Steady Metabolism

The body needs essential nutrients—chemicals the body itself cannot synthesize—to maintain a steady metabolism. Major food groups like carbohydrates, fats, proteins, minerals, and vitamins supply these essential nutrients.

Carbohydrates supply glucose and are essential sources of energy. Body tissues depend on glucose for every activity.

Fats are concentrated sources of energy, producing twice the energy per gram of both carbohydrates and protein. Fats help the body absorb vitamins and give structure to cellular membranes.

Proteins are the tissue-builders in the body. They form enzymes and hormones, and are involved in almost all body functions. They also supply energy.

Although proteins are found in every tissue in your body, they are particularly dense in muscle. Eating more protein gives you more amino acids, which are the building blocks of protein, and increases muscle mass. Because muscle requires more energy than fat, increasing muscle increases your BMR. In addition, your body burns more calories metabolizing proteins than carbs or fat.

Minerals and vitamins do not contribute directly to the body's metabolism, but they play an important role in metabolic pathways. A metabolic pathway is a process, or a group of chemical reactions the body uses to achieve specific results. For one example, calcium plays a role in bone function and density, but also in muscle contraction, thyroid function, and nutrient absorption,

Healthy Foods That Can Increase Your Metabolism

A healthy eating plan that includes a good balance of organic, fresh foods from all food groups is key to having an adequate metabolism. Incorporate these nine foods into your metabolism-increasing diet:

1. **Green tea:** Its catechin polyphenol content intensifies fat oxidation, or fat burning, and thermogenesis, which is the rate at which body burns calories. Green tea also inhibits fat absorption and helps glucose regulation.
2. **Coffee:** Just one cup a day increases BMR.
3. **Milk:** It's an excellent source of calcium, which participates in almost all metabolic pathways—including the important job of decreasing fat absorption from the intestines. Almond milk contains double the calcium of cow's milk.
4. **Egg whites:** They contain proteins and vitamin D, which, among many other roles in the body, helps in the absorption of calcium by the digestive system.

5. **Lean meats:** They contain a complete source of protein and are good sources of iron; iron deficiency has been associated with slow metabolism, as it also participates in many metabolic chemical reactions.

6. **Water:** Even mild dehydration may slow BMR, so it's important to stay hydrated.

7. **Chili peppers:** They contain a chemical compound called capsaicin, which produces a transient increase in BMR. The same effect occurs when you eat ginger.

8. **Whole grains:** It takes an extra effort from your digestive system to break down whole grains, so you burn more calories when you eat them. Make sure to select foods with real whole grains, not processed foods.

9. **Lentils:** They are an excellent source of iron and protein, which as we've seen both help to bolster metabolism.

Other Metabolism-Increasing Habits

Others habits that may increase metabolism are:

- **Increasing daily physical activity:** It's the most variable factor that determines how many calories you burn each day. Every extra movement counts.
- **Exercise:** Regular aerobic exercise and muscle training are equally important in boosting your metabolism.
- **Eating regularly:** This maintains a stable blood sugar level and avoids cravings. Eat three major meals a day, making your lunch the most important one, and two small healthy snacks.

Be sure to consult a certified nutritionist before making any changes to your diet, as requirements vary on an individual basis. For best results, change in your eating habits should be accompanied by an adequate exercise routine.