



## Glossary of dieting terms

By Matt Jacks

PO Box 2065  
Bondi Junction  
NSW 1355

info@healthyintentions.com.au  
www.healthyintention.com.au

## fact sheet

So, you need to diet. Maybe you think this yourself, or maybe friends and family have been dropping a few non-too subtle hints about your current weight. Whatever the case, you are not alone. Many people diet regularly to control their weight, but even so, the question of just what to eat or drink can be confusing and worrisome at times. For some help, here's a glossary of many terms on this topic.

Please Note: the food label terms in this glossary apply to the United States and while Australia and other countries may use the same wording, the numerical values of calories or fat may differ.

- **Adipose**  
This word means fatty; consisting of or containing fat.
- **Amino Acids**  
Nine of these essential 'building blocks of proteins' cannot be manufactured by the body alone and so have to be provided through food intake. People following a Vegan diet should be aware that it is not possible to receive all necessary amino acids through consumption of vegetables alone. (See Proteins and Vegan Diet).
- **Anorectic Drugs**  
These are drugs used to make people eat less food by suppressing a person's appetite, and therefore lessen the intake of calories. (See Calorie).
- **Artificial Sweeteners**  
These variously named chemicals have lower calories than the sugar they replace.
- **BIA (Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis)**  
This is a method for the estimation of how much body fat is present in a person, by passing a safe electric current through their body. The flow of the electricity is made more difficult by higher amounts of fat, and conversely, the current's flow is easier if less fat is present. So the flow of current is then measured to provide the body fat percent reading. (See Body Fat).
- **Blood Sugar Levels**  
The level or amount of glucose in the bloodstream. (See Glucose).
- **BMI (Body Mass Index)**  
This is a very common method of evaluating individual people to see if they are under or overweight. It involves comparing their weight to their height by dividing the weight measurement (expressed in kilograms) by the square of the height (expressed in meters). A BMI of below 18.5 is underweight, between 18.5 and 25 is an indication of healthy weight, 25 to 30 is overweight, a BMI of over 30 is referred to as obese, over 35 is known as morbidly obesity, and over 40 indicates extreme obesity.



for medical reasons. The word can also be used to mean the habitual food intake of people or animals.

- **Dietary**  
Anything pertaining to a diet is dietary.
- **Diuretic**  
Diuretic drugs or substances increase the amount of urine produced in the body, and thereby can give a false impression of weight loss by reducing the water content of the body. Although no fat is lost due when using diuretics, too much potassium can be, as well as other vital minerals and vitamins. (See Electrolytes).
- **Electrolytes**  
These are mineral salts such as calcium, magnesium, potassium and sodium. They are necessary in any diet for healthy nerves and muscle movement. Many people on diets use sports drinks (electrolyte solutions) to top them up, but these can also contain added sugars.
- **Energy Expenditure**  
This is the energy, expressed as calories, used or 'burned' in exercise. Exercise is often recommended as a companion to dieting for the purpose of losing weight.
- **Enriched, or enrichment**  
These are processed foods that have nutrients added to them, either to enhance the original nutrient content or to replace any nutrients that were lost during processing.
- **Essential Fatty Acids**  
These are fats that must be present in a diet for good health. They are principally gained from vegetable oils. (See Fat).
- **Exchange Diet/Plan**  
This is a weight-loss plan where foods with equal calorific values are divided up into separate groupings. The person on the diet can then interchange foods from within each list at mealtimes to allow for more choice and variety within the dietary regime. (See Exchange Lists).
- **Exchange Lists**  
These are the lists of swappable foodstuffs that have been divided up according to their energy and nutritional qualities for the purpose of an exchange diet.
- **Extra Lean**  
Food labelling terminology that means there is less than 2g of saturated fat, less than 5g of overall fat and no more than 95mg of cholesterol for a 100g portion of meat, poultry, game meat, or seafood.
- **Fad Diets**  
These are fashionable diets that come and go on the health scene. Often highly controversial, they are heavily hyped with spectacular claims but contain dubious nutritional and weight-loss advice. Competent medical opinion should always be sought before starting on any diet.
- **Fat**  
Fat is necessary for human health and together with carbohydrates and proteins, provides us with the energy to live. Fat also helps us by allowing the 'fat soluble' vitamins A, D, E and K to be transported around the body and utilised where needed. However, having too much fat is responsible for many health concerns, and in most cultures (though not all) is considered to be unattractive. As a result, millions of people around the world are dieting to reduce the fat content of their bodies.

There are different types of fat and those found in food are a combination of types of fatty acids. Though each holds the same 9 calories per gram, they differ in other ways. Saturated fats (solid at room temperature) are mainly found in foodstuffs of animal origin, such as butter, cheese, cream, red meats and milk, but also in plant products such as cocoa butter

and coconut oil. They may cause cholesterol in the blood to increase when too much is consumed, risking heart disease. Unsaturated fats (liquid at room temperature) do not raise cholesterol levels, and may help to decrease them. They are divided into monounsaturated fats, which are found in sea foods and vegetable oils, such as peanut or olive oil, and highly unsaturated polyunsaturated fats, in vegetable fats like sunflower oil, to give one example. (See also Essential Fatty Acids and Hydrogenated Fat).

- **Fat-free**  
A food label term that means there is less than 0.5g of fat in a given size serving.
- **Fat Replacers**  
There are many of these substances, either based on proteins, carbohydrates, fibre, or different forms of fatty acids, that are used as ingredients in various foods to mimic the applications of fat, but with much less calories.
- **FDA (Food & Drug Administration)**  
In the United States, this is the federal government agency concerned with monitoring and regulating food and drugs.
- **Fibre**  
This is a generic term referring to plant structures such as cellulose. These forms of complex carbohydrates cannot be digested by humans; however as roughage, fibre aids bodily health.
- **Food Journal**  
This is a written record of all foods and drinks consumed by a person over a given time. It can assist in personalising dietary planning.
- **Food Pyramid**  
A graphic aid to a healthy diet. The foodstuffs at the bottom of the pyramid are encouraged as being low calorie and high volume; whereas those foods at the top; should not be consumed often, as they are high calorie foods.
- **Fortified**  
Fortified foods or drinks are those that have had extra vitamins and minerals added to them.
- **Glucose**  
A very important sugar that most carbohydrates are made up of. Glucose provides energy for our body cells after it has been carried to them in the bloodstream; it can either be used immediately or stored for later. (See Hyperglycaemia and Hypoglycaemia).
- **Gram**  
A metric unit for weight and mass present on food labels. One gram (1g) is one thousandth of one kilogram (1kg).
- **High-calorie Low-volume Foods**  
These are foods that do not often satisfy our appetite—so encouraging us to consume more of them—even though they are high in calories. Subsequently more of this food is eaten than necessary, leading to weight gain. (See Layered Eating, and Low Calorie – High Volume).
- **Hydrogenated Fat**  
This is a fat that has been chemically altered from a liquid (oil) to a solid fat. Margarines, for example, are hydrogenated fats, and contain trans-fatty acids. Over consumption of these products can raise cholesterol in the blood even though the original fats were vegetable oils, which as unsaturated fats, do not raise cholesterol. (See Fat).
- **Hyperglycaemia**  
This is a condition caused by there being too much glucose in the bloodstream, also known as high blood sugar. (See Hypoglycaemia and Glucose).
- **Hypoglycaemia**  
A condition where there is too little glucose in the blood for good health, also known as low blood sugar. (See Hyperglycaemia and Glucose).

- **Lactose**  
This is the predominant carbohydrate in milk. It is more often known as milk sugar.
- **Lacto-vegetarian Diet**  
This is a diet in which vegetables and dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt, etc.) are permitted, but eggs and all meats are not.
- **Layered Eating**  
This is a common sense approach to weight loss whereby low-calorie high-volume foods are eaten in meals before high-calorie low-volume foods are touched. This way, an appetite might be satisfied without any unnecessary extra calorific intake. (See High-calorie Low-volume and Low-calorie High-volume).
- **Lean**  
On meat, game meats, poultry and seafood, this label indicates there should be no more than 10g of fat, of which saturated fat can be no more than 4.5g, and less than 95mg of cholesterol per 100g serving.
- **Lean Body Mass**  
All of the body with the exception of adipose tissue (fat).
- **Lifestyle Change**  
A step up from a diet, which can be short lasting, a lifestyle change means a long-term commitment to healthier food intake and/or exercise over the coming years.
- **Light**  
On food labels, this product has a third of the calories, or half of the fat of the regular alternative.
- **Lipids**  
This is a food group that includes cholesterol, fat and oils.
- **Low Calorie**  
A food label term that means the food or drink must have 40 calories or less per given serving.
- **Low-calorie High-volume Foods**  
These are foods that fill can fill a hungry stomach without giving many calories to the body. Vegetable soups are an example of this.
- **Low Fat**  
This food labelling term denotes the product has less than 3g of fat in a given size of serving.
- **Macrobiotic Diet**  
This is a diet that originates from Eastern philosophies. Encouraging food choices to match the seasons of the year, it is mostly vegetarian, but also includes sea foods. (See Vegetarian).
- **Metabolism**  
This is the collective name for all the life-maintaining biochemical processes that take place within our bodies concerned with the breaking down of food, and the subsequent release and utilisation of the then available energy.
- **Minerals**  
Inorganic (non-carbon containing) elements that are vital for health.
- **Monounsaturated Fat**  
See Fat.
- **Morbid Obesity**  
See BMI.
- **Mormon Tea**  
Known also as Desert Tea, this contains a stimulant called ephedrine which increases the body's metabolic rate for the increased 'burning' of calories. (See Calories and Metabolism).
- **Nutrients**  
All substances from food and drink that the body uses for energy, growth, upkeep and repair.

- **Nutritionist**  
A professional who advises on diet planning for weight loss, medical reasons, or as an anti-allergic precaution.
- **Obese**  
See BMI.
- **Oils**  
Related to fats, oils are tryglycerides that are liquid at room temperature, whereas fats are tryglycerides that are solid at room temperature. (See Triglycerides).
- **Overweight**  
See BMI.
- **Ovo-vegetarian Diet**  
This is a vegetarian (plant-based) diet that also includes eggs, for the prevention of amino acid deficiency. (See Amino Acids).
- **Plateau**  
A word borrowed from geography. Here, in dieting, it means a stable level having been attained, where enough fat has been lost to match calorie intake with a lower metabolism.
- **Polyunsaturated Fat**  
See Fat.
- **Proteins**  
These are organic (carbon containing) substances that are vital for a healthy diet. Built up from amino acids, they are used for building much of the body, including bones, muscles and skin. The amino acids they contain are needed for the construction of all living cells. Each gram of a protein provides 4 calories. (See Amino Acids).
- **Raw Food Diet**  
This is a variant of the vegan diet that encourages the non-cooking of vegetables, grains, pulses, etc. It can lead to protein deficiency. (See Vegan Diet and Proteins).
- **Reduced Fat**  
On food labels, this food must have 25 per cent or less the fat content than the regular product. Also known as 'less fat'.
- **Reasonable Goal**  
A simple target that can be met to encourage further good observance of a dietary plan.
- **Reduced Calories**  
This food product must have 25 per cent or less of the calories of the same size regular alternative to qualify for this labelling term. Can also be termed as 'fewer calories'.
- **Registered Dietician (RD)**  
An expert on food health. In the United States, anyone who wishes to become a registered dietician must study an ADA (American Dietetic Association). approved college study course and pass the exam.
- **Saturated Fat**  
See Fat.
- **Serving Size**  
This is the given portion or amount of food used for reference purposes on a product's food label.
- **Spirulina**  
This nutrient-rich blue-green algae is often hailed as a wonder food for many aspects of health and diet.
- **Starch**  
See Complex Carbohydrates.
- **Sucrose**  
This is the scientific name for table sugar. It is a mix of fructose and glucose and can be found in many plants.

- **Simple Carbohydrates**  
These are sugars like glucose, fructose etc. that provide instantly accessible energy boosts for the body. Unlike starches, their chemical make-up contains only one or two sugar molecules. (See Carbohydrates, Complex Carbohydrates, and Fibre).
- **Unsaturated Fat**  
See Fat.
- **Vegan Diet**  
This is an extreme form of vegetarian diet, where not only red meat, poultry and fish are avoided, but also anything of animal origin such as eggs, dairy and even honey. (See Amino Acids).
- **Vegetarian**  
A plant-based diet that also permits eggs and dairy. (See also Lacto-vegetarian Diet, Macrobiotic Diet, and Ovo-vegetarian Diet).
- **Vitamins**  
These organic nutrients are essential to health and no healthy diet should disregard them.
- **Very Low Calorie Diet (VLCD)**  
These diets involve the consumption (usually to the total exclusion, sometimes to the semi-exclusion of all other foods) of commercially prepared formulaic drinks that provide all necessary nutrients. They can allow for the rapid loss of weight, but should not be continued in the long term.
- **Whole Grain**  
These healthy products contain grain that has kept its outer covering, which is rich in fibre, vitamins and minerals.
- **Waist-to-hip Ratio (WHR)**  
This is the ratio of a person's waist circumference, measured around the belly button, to their hip circumference, measured at the widest point of the hips.
- **Yo-Yo Dieting**  
This is a practice where a person will lose weight, then gain weight, lose it, then gain it, and so on, in a repeating cycle.

So are you still going to go on that diet then? You know you'll only feel guilty if you don't. It's better for your health in the long run, even though it may not be that much fun to stick with it at times. Healthy alternatives are certainly a lot better tasting than they used to be, you may even find you don't miss junk food that much after a while, once you've broken the habit.

And to help you there is a wide range of planned-out diets to help you lose weight, if you don't like the idea of having to bother working out all the calories each day for yourself. Some are long-standing favourites of the health conscious, whilst others such as the controversial Atkins low-carbohydrate diet have been set upon the public relatively recently.

So whether you just want to cut out some fat here and there, or turn dieting into a quasi religion and convert the faithless, don't let it drive you mad. Remember, you're supposed to do it for your good health!

## About the author

*Matt Jacks is a successful freelance copywriter who provides valuable tips and advice for consumers on a range of topics including weight loss. His numerous articles offer moneysaving tips and valuable insight on typically confusing topics.*

*This edited version of 'Glossary of Dieting Terms' is reprinted with permission from [www.Freelancers-wanted.com](http://www.Freelancers-wanted.com)*

© 2004 - [Freelancers-wanted.com](http://www.Freelancers-wanted.com).