

## Realistic and sustainable

The body doesn't like to change weight rapidly; it takes **time** to increase or reduce weight healthily and for long term results. Extreme dietary attempts for fast weight loss and changes to body composition can be harmful and increase the risk of illness or injury, especially with a high training load. Successful fat loss and avoiding yo-yo diets requires realistic goals and applying consistent good eating habits with a practical and positive attitude towards food and lifestyle.

### Balance

To lose weight you need to **eat less energy than what your body uses** each day through bodily processes and activity. While it sounds simple, the body becomes quite sensitive when it receives a lot less energy than what it needs to function. If too much energy is restricted from the body it will conserve the energy it gets from food and may reduce the total amount of energy it expends each day. Skipping meals or not eating enough of the right foods at meal times makes the body think it is being starved so energy use slows down.

*Think of it this way, if you have money regularly going into your bank account you can spend money a lot more freely than a situation when you don't know when the next pay cheque is coming in. Much like energy, you have to reassure the body it can use its stores as fuel rather than save them for periods of low energy.*

### Why do you need body fat?

Optimal performance does not need fat to be at its lowest possible level. A certain level of body fat is essential for high intensity training and important for hormonal status and menstrual cycles in women as well as insulation and cushioning the body, important for contact sports (see 'Fats' fact sheet).

### Flexibility with food patterns

Maintaining weight is not 'one diet fits all'; just as there isn't one body shape for everyone. Food and dietary requirements will vary depending on training times, body size, sport, and annual training cycles. Considerations need to be made to reassess dietary requirements and be flexible with the times, type and amount of food eaten to suit these phases.

Taking ownership over dietary patterns will help create confidence in your own healthy food choices rather than being influenced by media and society on what to eat.

**If you want or need to alter your weight for your sport there are ways to do it so energy levels and performance aren't sacrificed. The timing and type of meals you eat to fuel your training can help to subside strong hunger pains yet still provide fuel for increases in strength. Speak to a sports dietitian by contacting [sally.walker@nswis.com.au](mailto:sally.walker@nswis.com.au)**

### Tips for reaching a suitable weight

- Discuss with your coaches a realistic weight/body fat level which is maintainable and healthy to train and compete.
- Keep meals and food choices balanced including choices of wholegrain carbohydrates, lean proteins and some vegetables or nutrients.
- Fat is important in the diet, however, it is dense in energy, reducing obvious sources is one method to reduce total kilojoules.
- Portion sizes shouldn't be too big, eat more often in smaller amounts.
- If you are eating out often try to make sensible choices that are not too high in fat and aim to always include some vegetables.
- Allow yourself a few treats occasionally.
- It's good to increase your food intake during high levels of training so you have flexibility to reduce intake when training is also reduced.
- Weight loss should be gradual with 0.5 – 1 kg per week; this may still be too rapid but is more likely to be sustainable.
- Don't skip meals, especially around training as it will make you hungrier and more likely to pick at the wrong foods later in the day when you aren't being as active.
- Weight can fluctuate around 2kg a day.