

# A Better Way to Control Calories

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As a fitness professional or nutrition coach, you know calories (<http://www.idealife.com/fitness-library/creative-calorie-hacks>) matter. Fundamentally, human body weight is controlled by energy balance—calories in vs. calories out.

But having clients meticulously count calories and track macronutrients is not the solution in most cases. That approach is often tedious, inexact and unsustainable. It takes handbooks, websites, databases and math. Just to plan lunch.

While calories do count, it has become clear that counting them won't help most people over the long term. However, we still want clients to be aware of how much they eat each day—and be able to easily adjust their intake to reach their goals (<http://www.idealife.com/fitness-library/the-reason-your-clients-dont-achieve-their-goals>).

Fortunately, there's a better, simpler way. So put down the calculators. Put away the food scales. Turn off the calorie-counting apps. It's time to stop counting calories.

## Where Calorie Counting Goes Wrong

As we noted, calorie counting has some inherent problems (Lucan & DiNicolantonio 2015). For one thing, calorie estimates are often wrong (Urban et al. 2010), sometimes by as much as 25% (Livesey 2001). And calorie-expenditure equations are often wrong, too (Frankfield, Roth-Yousey & Compher 2005).

This means that for all the effort clients put into weighing, measuring and logging their food—not to mention tracking their exercise and making the two balance—they're rewarded with less precision than you'd think.

And that's not all. Counting calories can derail clients because it's not only giving them the wrong information—it's also giving them *too much* information. For clients trying to effect change in their lives—like losing weight or adopting healthier habits—too much granular detail and conflicting information can actually make change harder.

In other words, focusing on less can actually help clients accomplish *more*.

When eating (<http://www.idealife.com/fitness-library/eating-with-the-seasons>) becomes overcomplicated, people are more likely to give up and fall back on old habits (<http://www.idealife.com/fitness-library/yes-you-can-develop-better-eating-habits-0>). That's simply human nature.

And research has repeatedly shown that being able to stick with a dietary approach is the only factor strongly associated with weight loss (<http://www.idealife.com/fitness-library/virtual-reality-and-weight-loss>), regardless of dietary ideology or approach used (e.g., Paleo, low-carb, low-fat, etc.) (Johnston et al. 2014).

The key seems to be to find ways to help clients consistently eat quality foods in appropriate amounts. So, as a coach, how can you best help clients do that?

## A Better Approach

At Precision Nutrition, we use a simple method that helps people build an awareness (<http://www.idealife.com/fitness-library/yoga-teaching-tips-cues-to-cultivate-awareness>) of what they're eating. It's easy, it's portable, and it's scaled to the size of the individual.

All you need is the ability to count to 2. And your own hand.

Here how it works:

- Your palm determines your protein portions.
- Your fist determines your veggie portions.
- Your cupped hand determines your carb portions.
- Your thumb determines your fat portions.

Of course, everybody is a little different. There's not one "perfect" way of doing things, just as there's not one "perfect diet" for everyone. But since bigger people tend to have bigger hands and smaller people tend to have smaller hands, your own hand can be a personalized (and portable) measuring device for your food intake (<http://www.idealife.com/fitness-library/carbohydrate-intake-for-endurance-training-redefining-traditional-views>).

True, some people do have larger or smaller hands for their body size. Still, hand size correlates pretty closely with general body size. And that means that with this system most people's meals and portions will scale to their body size.

Let's break down how this works one food group at a time.

## How Much Protein Do Clients Need?

For protein-dense foods like meat, fish, eggs, cottage cheese and Greek yogurt, use a **palm-sized serving**. This means a serving has the same thickness and diameter as your palm. Each palm-sized serving provides approximately 20–30 grams of protein.

For men, we generally recommend six to eight palm-sized portions of protein each day. To simplify further, we generally suggest two palm-sized portions in each meal, assuming clients eat four meals per day.

For women, we generally recommend four to six palm-sized portions of protein each day. For simplicity, this works out to roughly one palm-sized portion in each meal (again, assuming four meals per day).

This helps clients meet their protein needs (<http://www.idealife.com/fitness-library/protein-how-much-is-too-much>) to build muscle, burn fat, improve recovery and boost performance.

# How Many Veggies Do Clients Need?

For nonstarchy colorful vegetables (think broccoli, spinach, salad, carrots, etc.), use a **fist-sized serving**. Again, a fist-sized portion has the same thickness and diameter as your fist.

For men, we generally recommend six to eight fist-sized portions of vegetables each day. That comes out to roughly two fist-sized portions in each meal.

For women, we generally recommend four to six fist-sized portions of vegetables each day. This works out to roughly one fist-sized portion in each meal.

Of course, clients are free to eat more veggies, but just adding one fist-sized portion to each meal is a great starting place for many people.

# How Many Carbs Do Clients Need?

For carbohydrate-dense foods—like grains, starches or fruits—use a **cupped hand** to determine your serving size.

For more information and practical tips, please see “Nutrition by the Handful: An Alternative to Counting Calories” (<http://www.idealife.com/fitness-library/nutrition-by-the-handful-an-alternative-to-counting-calories>) in the online IDEA Library or in the April 2016 issue of *IDEA Fitness Journal*. If you cannot access the full article and would like to, please contact the IDEA Inspired Service Team at (800) 999-4332, ext. 7.

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As an elite nutrition coach and exercise physiologist, Dr. Berardi has coached hundreds of elite amateur and professional athletes. In fact, in the last two Winter Olympics alone, his athletes have collected over 25 medals, 12 of them gold. Further, for the last 3 years, Dr. Berardi has acted as the director of the world's largest body transformation project. This one-of-a-kind fat loss coaching program has produced more total weight loss than all 10 seasons of The Biggest Loser combined.

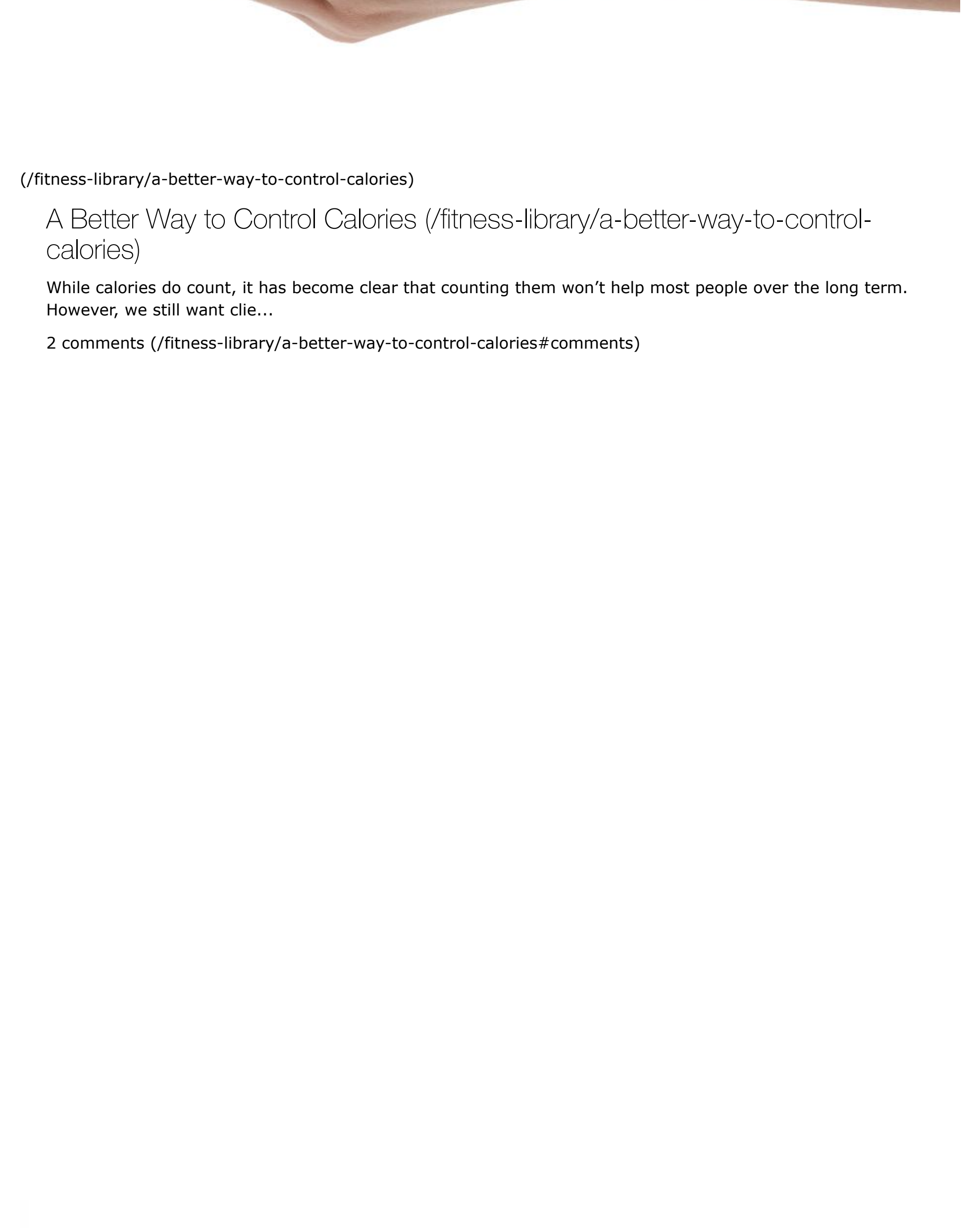


(/fitness-library/how-diet-influences-gene-expression-1)

## How Diet Influences Gene Expression (/fitness-library/how-diet-influences-gene-expression-1)

To read more about how diet and daily activities influence how genes do their jobs, please see "Epigenetics and Food" in the online IDEA Lib...





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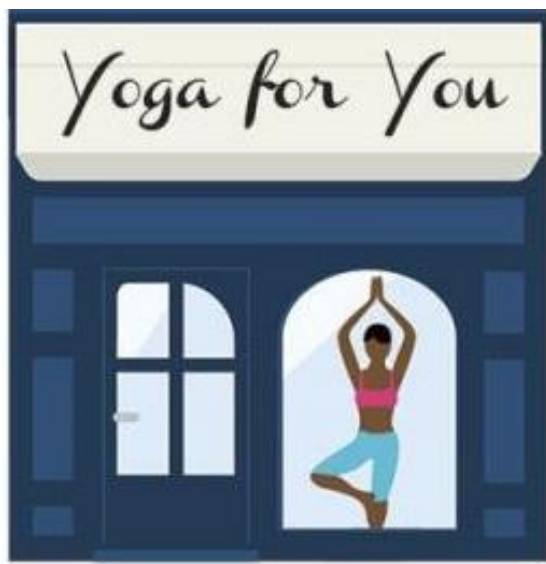
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(/fitness-library/program-design-plyometrics-strength)

Program Design: Plyometrics + Strength (/fitness-library/program-design-plyometrics-strength)

Many participants are showing up to class ready to be pushed hard. The challenge for you, as the instructor, is to keep programs form-focuse...



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Are There Too Many Yoga Teachers? (/fitness-library/are-there-too-many-yoga-teachers)

Today, yoga is offered in almost any setting where people gather. Alongside the steep rise in class participants, teacher-training programs ...

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fitness-trackers-are-right-for-your-clients)

As a fitness expert, you've likely had at least a couple, if not dozens, of fitness clients/participants ask you about activity tracke...



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## How DNA Influences Weight Loss (/fitness-library/how-dna-influences-weight-loss)

Weight loss is a multibillion-dollar industry affecting millions of people each year. And it's no surprise that most of the collective...

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## Financing Alternatives for Your Fitness Business (/fitness-library/financing-alternatives-for-your-fitness-business)

When I opened my studio several years ago, I had very little credit available to purchase equipment. Okay, the truth was I was drowning in d...





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People Are Talking About... (/fitness-library/in-the-wellness-community-people-are-talking-about)

As awareness of health issues rises, the conversation in the health and wellness community is continually evolving. Here is a taste of wh...

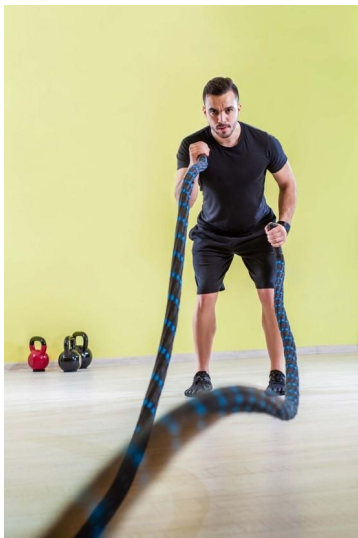


(/fitness-library/understanding-research-terminology)

Understanding Research Terminology (/fitness-library/understanding-research-terminology)

research-terminology)

With research studies so easy to find on the Internet, fitness professionals are regularly bombarded by clients asking for interpretations. ...



## Fat Loss and Muscle Gain: An Elusive Combination (/fitness-library/fat-loss-and-muscle-gain-an-elusive-combination)

Clients and fitness pros alike must often feel they are chasing unicorns in the tricky quest to gain muscle and lose fat. Indeed, researchers at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, showed in a rec...

