Have you ever wondered how many calories you need each day? Calories can be confusing, but they don’t have to be. Calories are units of energy found in foods and beverages. Each person needs a different amount of calories to keep their body functioning at rest. This is called our “Resting Metabolic Rate” or RMR. Your RMR is the minimum amount of energy your body needs for breathing, blood circulation, controlling body temperature, brain and nerve function, etc. – it’s basically the energy you need to lay in bed all day. This doesn’t include any additional activity you do such as walking to class or exercising.

Overall calorie needs depend on factors such as age, sex, height, weight, and physical activity level. Calorie needs will also change depending on your weight goals. There are several ways to calculate how many calories you need, many of which are complicated. Here’s one easy equation you can use to estimate your needs:

\[
\text{WEIGHT (LBS.)} \times \text{ACTIVITY LEVEL} = \text{ESTIMATED CALORIE NEEDS}
\]

**Activity Level**

10 = RMR

13 = No activity to light exercise 1-2 days/week

14-15 = Low Active (<1 hr/day)

16-17 = Active (~1 hr/day)

18-19 = Very Active (~2 hr/day)

20-21 = Extremely Active (>3 hr/day)

Let’s say you’re a female and weigh 165 lbs. but you would like to weigh 135 lbs. and you are lightly active. To calculate your energy needs, multiply 165 lbs. x 13. That comes out to be 2,145 calories/day. Keep in mind this equation estimates how many calories you need to maintain your current weight. To estimate how many calories you would need for weight loss, subtract 300-500 calories from your answer to the equation above.* If your goal is weight gain, add anywhere from 500-1000 calories each day to that amount.

Before you go tracking every calorie you eat, keep in mind that you may not need to track your calories to achieve your goals. Tracking calories can be time consuming and for some people, can even become stressful. Try making changes to the quality of your food first. Don’t know where to start? Visit your friendly Nutrition Counselors at Campus Health Service for guidance and support.

* Note: it’s not recommended to consume less than 1200 calories/day.

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Food and nutrition services (including healthy eating, cooking skills, weight management, digestive problems, hormonal and cardiovascular diseases, and eating disorders) are offered year-round at Campus Health. Call (520) 621-6483 to make an appointment.

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