



Don't Be Fooled Again

The road to weight loss is littered with hype. Take this quiz and discover the smart eating strategies that'll help you drop pounds fast

BY ALAN ARAGON • ILLUSTRATION BY JOSEPH HEIDECKER

1 Eating six small meals instead of three regular ones . . .

- A** speeds your metabolism
- B** controls your blood sugar
- C** makes for more dirty dishes
- D** All of the above
- E** None of the above

2 "Reduced Fat!" on a food package also means . . .

- A** "Lower Calorie!"
- B** "Lower Carbs!" too.
- C** it will also "reduce fat" in your body
- D** someone's trying to trick you!

3 White rice or brown?

- A** Brown, because it has more fiber and vitamins.
- B** White, because it has fewer calories
- C** Doesn't matter—they're pretty much the same
- D** Doesn't matter once it's covered in sweet-and-sour glop

4 Lifting weights will . . .

- A** beat cardio for muscle building but won't help your endurance
- B** match cardio for endurance boosting and beat it for muscle gains
- A** build more muscle but burn less fat than cardio
- D** wear out your joints

5 Low-carb diets work well mostly because you consume plenty of . . .

- A** protein
- B** bacon!
- C** dietary fat
- D** water

6 How much protein can your body digest before the rest goes to waste?

- A** 10 grams
- B** 20 grams
- C** 30 grams
- D** You're probably still digesting the ribeye from this summer's cookout

7 The Glycemic Index is . . .

- A** a crucial element in calculating blood-sugar fluctuations
- B** a rating system that helps predict satiety and cravings
- C** an overblown factor for guys who are trying to lose weight
- D** an alt-rock breakout act at Coachella this year

8 True or false: Taking fish-oil supplements is a great way to lose weight.

- A** True—and the science backs it up
- B** False—research results are mixed
- C** If you're forced to eat fish, you'll definitely lose weight

9 The newest magic weight-loss pill is . . .

- A** There is no magic pill
- B** Aspirin
- C** Skittles
- D** Citrus aurantium, a.k.a. bitter orange

10 Taking in most of your daily calories at night . . .

- A** blunts growth hormone output, hindering your weight-loss effort
- B** can make you fatter because your metabolism slows during sleep
- C** is fun when the calories are wings and beer
- D** doesn't matter, as long as it's not bar food

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?

Answer #1: E

Frequent eating helps some people lose weight because it keeps them from becoming crazy hungry and pigging out. But the six-meal approach doesn't stoke your metabolism or steady your blood sugar. In fact, a recent Syracuse University study found that eating six meals a day actually *raised* blood sugar versus the same diet consumed in three meals.

YOUR TAKEAWAY // Eat as often as you like, but watch your meal size if you go with six; half of those "meals" should be snacklike. If you want to eat less often, give your body a couple of weeks to adjust its hunger signals.

Answer #2: D

Sure, the packaged item may have less fat than its regular counterpart. But it may have more calories and carbs, and those are the markers that really matter. In most cases you're better off with the regular version—and your best bets are whole foods, not processed, prefab ones.

YOUR TAKEAWAY // Focus on the total number of calories you eat every day. And to debunk the diet-food hype, always read the small print on the nutrition label and ingredient list.

Answer #3: C or D

Brown rice isn't a cure-all. After all, the people of Okinawa, who have the world's longest life expectancy, regularly chow down on white rice. The fact is, a cup of cooked brown rice only has 3 grams more fiber than the same amount of white rice. And, ironically, a Brazilian study found that brown rice contains "antinutrients" that may actually *block* the absorption of some of its own nutrients.

YOUR TAKEAWAY // Eat the rice you prefer—just make sure to control portion size. What's on top matters more, so go easy on the sauce.

Answer #4: B

Everyone knows weight training is great for muscle growth and bone mass, but many still think it can't hold a candle to cardio when it comes to fat burning or cardiovascular health. That's dead wrong. A University of Colorado study that compared the energy burn from calorie-matched bouts of stationary cycling and weight training found that both types of exercise burned the same amount of fat over a 24-hour period. So unless you're trying to boost your endurance and VO₂ max, weight training can provide cardio benefits *and* trigger weight loss.

YOUR TAKEAWAY // Tired of pounding the treadmill? Start lifting. Maximize the cardio benefits and calorie burn by limiting rest periods between sets to 30 to 60 seconds, and by pushing past your rep target toward muscle failure.



Answer #5: A

Low-carb diets should really be called high-protein diets. It's the protein in a low-carb diet that helps you lose weight—not the carb reduction. Why? Skipping out on most carbs means you tend to load up on protein. That promotes greater satiety, so you tend to consume fewer total calories. Another advantage: Protein helps maintain your lean muscle while you're dieting, and that gives you a small but distinct metabolic advantage. Protein also has a higher "thermic effect" than fat or carbs have—meaning your body has to burn more calories to metabolize it.

YOUR TAKEAWAY // For a high-protein diet, use this fast formula to calculate your daily calories:

$$\text{Daily calorie target} = \text{target weight in lbs} \times (\text{average weekly training hours} + 9.5)$$

Then calculate your protein and fat needs: 1 gram of protein plus 1/2 gram of fat per pound of your target body weight. Multiply your protein grams by 4 and your fat grams by 9, and add those numbers together. Subtract that total from your daily calorie target to reveal your target carb-calorie amount.

Answer #6: D

Your body can absorb whatever dose of protein you ingest; larger amounts just take more time. Studies show that you retain an equal amount of lean muscle whether the day's food was consumed on a regular meal schedule or during a single 4-hour window.

YOUR TAKEAWAY // There's no need to parcel out your protein intake, although some protein at every meal is crucial to avoiding hunger. Just hit your protein goals (see Answer #5) according to your schedule—your body will use what it needs when it needs it.

Answer #7: C

For weight loss, the much-touted Glycemic Index (GI) doesn't matter a bit. The wrongheaded theory goes like this: The higher a food's GI score, the more it raises blood sugar, triggering insulin secretion and encouraging your body to store fat. The problem is, GI studies are based on unrealistic conditions—foods are given in isolation to people who have fasted overnight. What's more, the big factor for weight loss is caloric balance, not blood-sugar fluctuations. A *New England Journal of Medicine* study comparing followers of low- and high-GI diets found only about 2 pounds of difference in body weight after 6 months.

YOUR TAKEAWAY // Fiber-rich, low-GI carbs are healthy and keep you satisfied. But for weight loss, focus on keeping total carbohydrates (see Answer #5) on target.



Answer #8: B

Although some early studies linked fish-oil supplements to weight loss, current research indicates otherwise. In the largest and longest trial to date, Texas researchers found that the supplements didn't significantly speed fat loss.

YOUR TAKEAWAY // To protect your cardiovascular health, a fish-oil supplement is a good idea—especially if you hate eating seafood. Three to six 1-gram capsules a day is a good target. Just don't regard it as your weight-loss panacea.

Answer #9: A

Maybe your sister-in-law swears by bitter orange (a.k.a. citrus aurantium), but only one legitimate study has been done on it, and the results aren't impressive. While the supplement triggered an extra 2 pounds of weight loss over 6 weeks, the study participants were overweight and obese—meaning they tend to lose weight faster than normal weight people—and the supplement was given with caffeine and St. John's wort. Meanwhile, a 2006 study review cautioned that bitter orange may raise the risk of "adverse cardiovascular events."

YOUR TAKEAWAY // Save your cash. Forget magic pills and stick to diet and exercise.

Answer #10: D

It makes no difference whether you prefer hefty breakfasts or hearty dinners: As long as your overall daily intake and burn stay the same, so will your fat loss (or gain). The only thing that changes, according to a study in the journal *Obesity*, is when your body creates or burns that fat.

YOUR TAKEAWAY // Unless you have a specific need for more calories at one time of day (say, that half marathon in the morning), go with what fits your schedule and keeps you satisfied. ■

MEN, SCORE YOURSELVES

Give yourself a point for each correct answer, then see how you rank

0-2 POINTS

Either you breezed through the quiz while texting your girlfriend and pulling on your sneakers, or you need to retake Weight Loss 101. Don't worry, we don't judge.

6-8 POINTS

Not too shabby. Keep on amassing nuggets of weight-loss wisdom, and you'll soon be that irksome but enviable smartass who holds court at the juice bar.

3-5 POINTS

Like a rusty old Winnebago, your gut-shrinking know-how needs some work. The good news is that with some elbow grease, it'll still take you where you want to go.

8-10 POINTS

Armed with a lion's share of flab-melting insight, you should be able to hit your weight target with ease. Not there yet? What's that old saw about talking the talk?