

Solving the Metabolism Mystery – Building the Fire Within

by Jason Minich

Metabolism is such an interesting word. You hear it used often in television commercials and see it on product packaging. Many "weight loss" products have been sold using claims that they improve your *metabolism*. But what is it? A mysterious force within us that decides whether you are thin or not? A special energy bestowed upon a chosen few to allow them to eat whatever they want and not gain weight? Every day I answer questions like, "How can I get a good metabolism... mine is so slow?" or "Is it true that I will lose my metabolism after I turn fifty?"

Questions like these demonstrate that there is some confusion surrounding metabolism. I would like to help solve the metabolism mystery by assisting you in gaining understanding of what it is and what you can do to improve it. That's right! You are in control! So, in order to learn how we can make it work to our benefit, we must first define what metabolism is exactly.

Metabolism can be defined as the speed with which your body burns through fuel. Or better yet, how quickly and efficiently your body processes food and stored fuels (body fat) to sustain life. Our bodies are designed to intake food, digest and process it, and then utilize it so that we may live. This process produces energy and heat! In fact, a calorie is actually a measure of heat. With this knowledge, try to think of your metabolism as a fire burning within you. You are a heat machine!

If you want to build the fire within and improve your fat-burning heat machine, you must gain power over the following factors that you can control:

- **Meal Frequency** – That's right! To keep a fire burning hot, you must give it regular "good" fuel to burn. Consuming a small meal every three and a half hours will give you the frequency that you need. Go too long and your fire cools off.
- **Food Choices** - If you make sure that most of these meals consist of a lean protein and a blend of complex carbohydrates, then you will be doing great! Include carbohydrates that are high in fiber, and your fire will burn long. Sugary foods are like putting paper in your fire. It will fool you to think you are burning hot for a short moment, but in fact, it leaves your fire cold in no time. (Quick tip: Learn to read food labels and to recognize the various forms of sugar that might be listed there.)
- **Muscle Tissue** – If you don't remember anything else, remember this, the muscle tissue in your body IS your fat-burning machine. Muscle is active tissue and is the exact physical site in your body where fat is "burned off." Increase your muscle tissue through the last two factors along with resistance exercise (bodyweight exercises, weights, machines, resist-a-bands, etc.) and you will increase your metabolism. You will make your fire bigger. Decrease your muscle tissue through low calorie restrictive eating or inactivity and you will decrease your metabolism. You will decrease the size of your fire and burn less calories every minute of every day.

- **Activity Level** - Stay active and you will stir up the coals of your metabolism to keep it burning hot!
- **Stress and Water Intake** – Too much stress and poor water intake will suffocate your fire. Find ways to relax from time to time and drink even just a little more water to keep your body running smoothly and give it that breath of fresh air that you sometimes need.

Of course, it is important to mention that the **Genetics** that you are born with is one factor of metabolism that you cannot control. You are born with it. However, of all of the above factors, this one plays a minimal role in comparison to the others. Many people who are “born with a slow metabolism” make astounding physical changes just by focusing on those above factors that we can control. Build your fire within through these methods and you will see long-term success!

As you focus on building your metabolism through these controllable factors, it is important to remember that you will be and should be gaining some muscle tissue. This will encourage your body to release and “burn off” stored body fat! Muscle burns calories. Fat is simply stored fuel. The scale cannot tell you the difference! Fat is stored in a layer of tissue between your skin and your muscle. One does not become the other...they are both totally different substances. If you pay attention to only what the scale says, it can be frustrating as you gain muscle early on in a new fitness program and begin to build your fire within. Remember, don't focus on the scale! Focus on how you feel!

The bottom line is do not give up! Long-term success is what we want. If you haven't started, then get started! The ability to control your metabolism isn't such a mystery anymore. If you are still not sure what to do, ask someone you trust! Build that fire within you. Make it burn long and make it burn hot! You are in control!

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