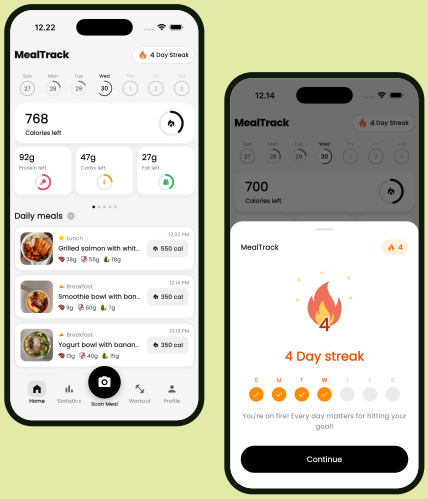
WEIGHT LOSS

How to Calculate a Calorie Deficit to Lose Weight (2026 Guide)

Four steps: find your maintenance calories, pick a safe deficit, set your daily target, then adjust with real data.

Updated October 19, 2026 · 8 min read · By the MealTrack team



QUICK ANSWER

To calculate a calorie deficit, first estimate your maintenance calories (TDEE): your basal metabolic rate from the **Mifflin-St Jeor formula** multiplied by an activity factor. Then subtract **300–500 kcal a day** for steady loss of roughly 0.25–0.5 kg (0.5–1 lb) a week. Track for two to three weeks, compare your average weight trend, and adjust the target by 100–200 kcal if you're not losing as expected.

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What a calorie deficit is

A calorie deficit means eating fewer calories than your body uses. Your body covers the gap with stored energy, mostly fat, so your weight trends down over time. A common rule

of thumb is that **about 7,700 kcal ≈ 1 kg of body fat** (3,500 kcal ≈ 1 lb), so a 500 kcal daily deficit adds up to roughly 0.5 kg a week.

It's a rule of thumb, not a law. Water, glycogen and a metabolism that adapts as you get lighter make real-world loss bumpier, especially in the first weeks. That's why step 4, adjusting with real data, matters more than the formula.

Step 1: Estimate your BMR

Your basal metabolic rate (BMR) is what your body burns at complete rest. The **Mifflin-St Jeor equation** is the formula most dietitians start with:

	BMR formula
Men	10 × weight (kg) + 6.25 × height (cm) - 5 × age + 5
Women	10 × weight (kg) + 6.25 × height (cm) - 5 × age - 161

Using pounds and inches? Convert first: pounds × 0.454 = kg, inches × 2.54 = cm.

Step 2: Multiply by your activity level

Your total daily energy expenditure (TDEE), also called maintenance calories, is your BMR times an activity factor. Be honest here: most people overestimate how active they are.

Activity level	What it looks like	BMR ×
Sedentary	Desk job, little or no exercise	1.2
Lightly active	Light exercise 1–3 days a week	1.375
Moderately active	Exercise 3–5 days a week	1.55
Very active	Hard exercise 6–7 days a week	1.725
Extra active	Physical job plus daily training	1.9

Step 3: Pick a safe deficit

Daily deficit	Expected loss per week	Best for
250–300 kcal	≈ 0.25 kg (0.5 lb)	Close to goal weight, or keeping muscle
500 kcal	≈ 0.5 kg (1 lb)	Most people: steady and sustainable
750–1,000 kcal	≈ 0.75–1 kg (1.5–2 lb)	A lot to lose, with care

Don't go too low

Unless a doctor supervises your diet, don't eat below about **1,200 kcal a day (women) or 1,500 kcal (men)**, and aim to lose no more than about 1% of your body weight per week. Very low intakes make it hard to get enough protein and nutrients, and they're hard to stick to.

Worked examples

Woman, 30, 165 cm, 70 kg, lightly active. BMR = 10 × 70 + 6.25 × 165 − 5 × 30 − 161 = **1,420 kcal**. TDEE = 1,420 × 1.375 = **1,950 kcal**. With a 500 kcal deficit, her target is about **1,450 kcal a day**.

Man, 35, 180 cm, 90 kg, moderately active. BMR = 10 × 90 + 6.25 × 180 − 5 × 35 + 5 = **1,855 kcal**. TDEE = 1,855 × 1.55 = **2,875 kcal**. With a 500 kcal deficit, his target is about **2,375 kcal a day**.



Skip the math

MealTrack sets your calorie and macro targets from your profile and goal, then shows what's left for the day every time you log a meal.

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Step 4: Adjust after 2–3 weeks

Formulas estimate; your scale measures. Weigh yourself a few mornings a week under the same conditions and compare **weekly averages**, not single days. Daily weight can swing 1–2 kg from water and salt alone.

- **Losing about as planned:** keep going.
- **No change after 3 weeks:** first check that oils, drinks and weekends are logged. Then lower your target by 100–200 kcal or add activity.
- **Losing faster than 1% a week:** eat 100–200 kcal more to protect muscle and energy.
- **Lost 5–10% of your weight:** recalculate. A lighter body needs fewer calories.

Lose fat, not muscle

A deficit works best with enough protein and some strength training. Aim for roughly **1.2–1.6 g of protein per kg** of body weight a day while you're losing weight. Our **protein guide** has a chart by body weight.

Frequently asked questions

How many calories should I eat to lose weight?

Start with your maintenance calories (TDEE) and subtract 300–500 kcal a day. Your own number depends on your size, age and activity, so calculate it rather than copying someone else's target, then adjust after 2–3 weeks of tracking.

Is a 1,000 calorie deficit safe?

It can be for people with a lot of weight to lose, but it's aggressive. It makes protein and nutrient needs harder to meet and often leads to rebound eating. Most people do better with 300–500 kcal, and anyone eating below about 1,200–1,500 kcal a day should do so with medical supervision.

Why am I not losing weight in a calorie deficit?

Usually the deficit is smaller than it looks: untracked oils, drinks, snacks and weekends add up, and activity levels are often overestimated. Water retention can also hide fat loss for a week or two. Track consistently for 2–3 weeks, compare weekly averages, then lower your target by 100–200 kcal if needed.

Should I eat back the calories I burn exercising?

Partially at most. Fitness trackers often overestimate calories burned. If your activity level already accounts for your workouts, don't add them back. If it doesn't, eating back about half is a cautious middle ground.

This guide is general information, not medical advice. Calorie and nutrient figures are typical values and estimates. Talk to a doctor or registered dietitian before making big changes to your diet, especially if you are pregnant, under 18, or managing a medical condition.

MealTrack

CHEAT SHEET

CALORIE DEFICIT IN 4 STEPS

From maintenance calories to a daily target that keeps working

500 kcal
daily deficit ≈ 0.5 kg a week

7,700
kcal ≈ 1 kg of body fat

2–3 wks
of tracking before you adjust

1 BMR, women

10 × kg + 6.25 × cm - 5 × age - 161

2 BMR, men

10 × kg + 6.25 × cm - 5 × age + 5

3 × activity factor

1.2 desk job · 1.375 light · 1.55 moderate · 1.725 very active

4 - 300 to 500 kcal

That's your daily target. Not below 1,200 (women) / 1,500 (men).

5 Weigh, then average

3+ mornings a week. Compare weekly averages, not single days.

6 Adjust 100–200 kcal

If the trend is flat after 3 weeks, or loss is over 1% a week.



Let MealTrack do the math.

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