

The No-Nonsense Guide to Fat Loss For Women Over Forty

Sandie Fredriksson is the creator of Healthy Habits for Life. She teaches busy women how to lose weight, have more energy and put their health on autopilot.



Sandie shares the one simple truth that will liberate you from fad dieting forever.

It sneaks up on you, usually in your mid to late 40's. Without warning, you're carrying an extra ten to fifteen pounds. And as if that wasn't enough, this unwelcome fat has chosen to settle right around your belly.

Whilst you've been busy running your home, volunteering at your kids school, impressing your boss and delivering to your clients, your body has been quietly playing a cruel trick on you. Or so it seems.

But what's really going on?

Even if you consider yourself to be an active person with a healthy diet, losing weight after 40 can be an infuriating uphill battle. What most people don't realise is that 70% of the energy you burn each day has nothing to do with how much you move, walk or exercise. It is simply your basal metabolic rate (BMR), which is the energy you burn by merely existing. As you move through your 40's your BMR starts to slow down which means your body requires around 200 fewer calories to accomplish its most basic (basal) life-sustaining functions. Reasons for this include the natural ageing of your metabolic processes, hormonal changes and gradual loss of precious muscle mass.

Why precious? Because the more muscle you have the more calories your body burns at rest.

However, after 30, we start to lose muscle at a rate of 3-8% per decade, and this is negatively compounded if you have a history of yo-yo dieting. Each time you stop-start an overly restrictive diet, you risk losing more and more muscle. Which means despite all the starvation and missed parties over the years, what you've actually been doing is grinding your metabolism lower.

Quite simply, if you remain oblivious to your slowing metabolism and consume the same amount of food and alcohol as you did in your 30s, it will get harder and harder to keep the weight off in your 40s and beyond.

And at the very time of our lives that we need to be firing up our metabolic engines, we are often less active than we have ever been. Allowing our waking hours to revolve around our kids and desk jobs can leave us overstretched and tired, and being sedentary, stressed and sleep-deprived is a bad combination when it comes to managing our weight. It's hardly surprising that with little time and energy for the gym, another fad diet might feel like your only option.

Many of the women who come to me with weight loss as their goal have a history of failed dieting. Their brains have been fried with misinformation resulting in a dent in their confidence and a side-serving of low self-esteem. Ketogenic, low-carb, low-fat, intermittent fasting - there are dozens of methods to choose from, and there is also a steady stream of adverts and influencers on your Insta feed looking to profit from your confusion.

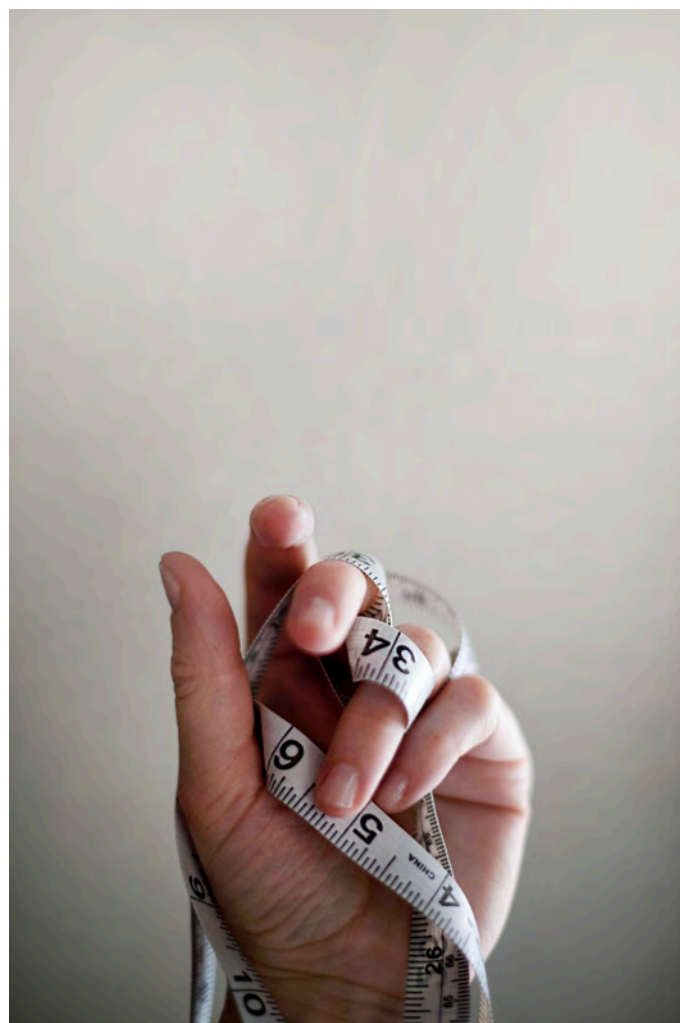
But what they aren't doing is telling you about the one thing that really matters. It's the principle behind every single one of these cleverly-packaged strategies, and that is the calorie deficit principle.

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The only way to lose fat is to consume fewer calories than you burn.

As a rule of thumb, you need a calorie deficit of 3,500 calories per week to lose one pound of fat. Breaking that down into a 500 calorie deficit target a day is a good place to start, but once you get in the swing of things, using a weekly deficit target of 3,500 will give you the flexibility to shift your calories to match your social calendar. The trick is to implement your calorie deficit in a way that feels freeing and sustainable. That might mean you give yourself permission to take a slower, more gradual approach and instead aim for half a pound of fat loss per week.

So, rather than blinding you with jargon and dressed-up methods, I want to take you straight to the calorie deficit principle and teach you the evidence-based strategies around weight loss that I use with my clients.





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Calculating your daily calorie target

There are a number of free tools on the internet that will help calculate the calorie deficit for your weight loss goal and therefore your calorie target per day. My favourite is [fitnesschef.co.uk](https://www.fitnesschef.co.uk), which I used to arrive at my personal 1450 daily calorie limit. Now, it's about how you apply this number to the food and drinks you consume. It's important to understand that all calories are created equal when it comes to weight loss. Which means 100 calories of crisps are the same as 100 calories of chicken, even though these different calorie sources are utilised in the body in different ways.

Tracking your calories consumed

This requires you to become a label-reading detective. When I first started, I used kitchen scales and measuring spoons to help me get to grips with the calories in my food. Now I use the Nutracheck app for tracking. I appreciate counting calories isn't for everyone, and you may already be following a more intuitive approach, which can work just as well. But the truth is that calories do count, and it is entirely possible to track your calories in a healthy and sustainable way by adopting a patient and flexible mindset. Think about it like this, dedicating a couple of weeks to educating yourself about the calories in your food is just as valuable as monitoring your spending to balance your finances. Too many weeks and months consuming more calories than your body needs will ultimately lead to weight gain.

Beware the healthy halo effect

Underestimating the calories in your meals, snacks and drinks is an easy trap to fall into, especially when it comes to healthy eating. You can be organically and nutritiously putting on weight, just as you can be losing weight eating junk food. Remember, as long as you are in a calorie deficit you will be losing fat. Once you understand this you will be able to include bread, pasta and anything else you enjoy in your diet. Of course, aiming for the majority of your calories to come from nutritious whole food sources is a sensible approach - our ageing bodies need all the help they can get. But leaving a little room each week for the foods you eat for pleasure will help your adherence long-term.

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Pay attention to portion size

It blew my mind when I realised there were 300-500 calories in a single avocado. And that the bowl of nuts I mindlessly munched through every afternoon was loading me up with an easy 300 calories a day. That's a big chunk of my 1450 calorie target! I'm not saying to forgo these nutritious, calorie-dense foods - we need healthy fats in our diet. But instead, consider adjusting your portion sizes and opt for half an avocado and a smaller portion of cashews and almonds. Top Tip: Being sleep deprived can negatively impact your hunger hormones (ghrelin and leptin) causing you to overeat and make poorer food choices.

Prioritise protein in your calorie target

One of the biggest mistakes I see my clients making is an underconsumption of protein. You should be aiming for 1-2 grams of protein per kilogram of your body weight per day, spread evenly across all your meals and snacks. This will keep you feeling fuller for longer, balance your blood sugar and also help build and maintain that precious muscle mass we talked about. Again, spend a bit of time growing your awareness of the protein content of the foods you consume - one egg (6g of protein), 100g of skinless chicken breast (30g of protein), 100g of boiled chickpeas (9g of protein), and use the internet or an app like Nutracheck to help you.

Get honest about your alcohol intake

Cutting back on alcohol is a quick way to make a massive dent in your calories consumed. There are seven calories per gram of alcohol, compared to four calories per gram of protein and carbohydrates (and nine in fat). Swapping

the 175 calories in a 250ml glass of wine for the 100 calories in a skinny bitch (vodka, fresh lime and soda) is a classic weight-loss hack.

Increasing the daily calories you burn

We already know that 70% of our total daily energy expenditure (TDEE) consists of our BMR. So what about the other 30%? The majority of this is made up from our planned exercise (running, training in the gym etc.) and our daily activities such as walking, emptying the dishwasher and taking the stairs rather than the escalator. By increasing our activity we can increase the number of calories our body burns, which will positively impact our calorie deficit.

Estimating the calories you burn

People have a tendency to overestimate how many calories they are burning through exercise. Here are some examples which might surprise you: burning just 100 calories (that's one gin and tonic or a 50g slice of bread) will look something like 10 minutes of running, 22 minutes of walking, 13 minutes of cycling, seven minutes of skipping or 30 minutes of yoga. Which means even if you are very active, you still need to pay attention to the calories inside of the energy equation to be losing fat. As the saying goes: You can't out-train a bad diet. Above all, when it comes to exercise, choose ways to move that you enjoy and that you can stick to.

The benefits of building muscle

Whilst walking is one of the best things you can do for your health and weight, I strongly encourage my clients to include resistance training in their schedule. This is an efficient way to ramp up your calorie burn as well as to improve your posture and preserve bone density. If I haven't said it enough, let me say it again: maintaining and building precious muscle mass will help keep your fat-burning tap on all day.

The most successful way of approaching a calorie deficit is through a combination of managing what you consume and being active. Finding a strategy you can stick to is key. I want you to enjoy life without eliminating any specific food groups and still include the occasional pizza, crisps and ice cream!

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