Each person has a daily calorie budget. Calories are units of energy. You spend calories to maintain body functions and provide energy for physical activity. If you take in more calories than you burn, you may “bank” the extra as body fat.

You can divide a calorie budget into essential and extra calories. Essential calories are the minimum calories you need to meet your basic needs.

Extra calories are called your discretionary calories. They are the extras in your diet.

The new food pyramid at www.mypyramid.gov can help you budget your calories. It can help you devise a personalized plan based on your age, sex and activity level.

**Try this question**

**What counts as discretionary calories?**

a. Foods with solid fats
b. Foods with added sugars
c. Alcohol
d. Food that exceeds recommendations from any food group
e. All of the above

The answer is “e.” All can count toward discretionary calories in your diet. The good news: The new pyramid allows some discretionary calories in your personalized eating plan. However, these amounts are small, usually 100 to 300 calories if you are physically active.

**How can you use your discretionary calories?**

▲ Eat more foods from any food group that the MyPyramid food guide recommends.

▲ Eat higher-calorie forms of foods. These can be any food that contains solid fats or added sugars, such as whole milk, cheese, sausage, biscuits, sweetened cereal and sweetened yogurt.

▲ Add fats or sweeteners to foods in the form of sauces, salad dressings, sugar, syrup or butter.

▲ Eat or drink items that are mostly fat, caloric sweetener or alcohol. Candy, soda, wine, and beer are examples.

**Watch out for hidden calories**

Foods with fats are concentrated sources of calories. Be careful when choosing these foods because even a small amount of a food with solid fats will add up to large amounts of discretionary calories.

Solid fats usually are found in foods such as:

- Cheese
- Cream
- Ice cream
- Bacon
- Sausage

Well-marbled cuts of meat
- Regular ground beef
- Poultry skin
- Many baked goods (cookies, crackers, donuts, pastries, etc.)
Be aware of added sweeteners

Various sugars and syrups are often added to foods during processing or preparation. These add calories without many nutrients. Common foods with added sweeteners include:

▲ Candy  ▲ Regular soft drinks
▲ Cakes, cookies and pies  ▲ Ice cream, sweetened yogurt, sweetened milk
▲ Fruit drinks such as fruit punch  ▲ Sweetened cereals, sweet rolls, cinnamon toast

To identify added sugars, look on the ingredient label for ingredients such as brown sugar, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, lactose, maltose, malt syrup, molasses, raw sugar, sucrose, sugar or syrup.

Choose wisely when spending your discretionary calories:

▲ Select foods with less fat and less sugar.
▲ Watch out for “luxury” versions of foods such as fatty meats or sweetened cereals.
▲ Be careful when adding sauces, condiments or other “extras” to foods.

Choose discretionary calorie foods that you really enjoy, give you satisfaction and you have in a small amount.

For more information on how to figure out your calorie budget, check out www.MyPyramid.gov

For more information about nutrition, food safety and health, visit www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/food.htm

Try this example

The chart gives a general guide for discretionary calories. How many calories are estimated for a physically active 32-year-old female? How many discretionary calories are allotted for her?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender and Age</th>
<th>Not physically active*</th>
<th>Physically active**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimated total calorie need</td>
<td>Estimated discretionary calorie allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-8 years</td>
<td>1,200-1,400</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-13 years</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-18 years</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-13 years</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-18 years</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-30 years</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50 years</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51+ years</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-30 years</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50 years</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51+ years</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These amounts are appropriate for individuals who get less than 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days.
** These amounts are appropriate for individuals who get at least 30 minutes (lower calorie level) to at least 60 minutes (higher calorie level) of moderate physical activity most days.

Answer: 2,000 to 2,200 calories

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For more information on this and other topics, see: www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu