11 Sneaky Hacks that BOOST METABOLISM
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Introduction

The other day, I was reading through a tennis instruction program that I bought online, and one of the components of the program was a special report called “student secrets”. What this instructor asked all of his students over the years to submit their very best “tip” for winning matches. He received over 900 replies and whittled them down to the best 60 tips, which he compiled into a special report.

I was thinking about that tennis program when I put together this special report. While these tips are not directly from my clients, they’re all actions you can take that I have found incredibly powerful for turbo-charging fat loss. I call them “metabolic hacks”, but the truth is, not all of them have to do with your metabolism. Because hormones rule everything—especially weight gain and loss—anything that significantly impacts your hormones (like stress, for example, or sleep) can have a profound effect on your metabolism.

I think you’ll find these 11 tips to be really useful in moving you toward your goals. Remember, don’t try to do all of them, certainly not all at once. Try them on for size, see if they work for you, throw out the ones that don’t and keep the ones that do.

Come to think of it, that’s a pretty good strategy for anything that has to do with fat loss! So let’s get started.

#1: Eat Before You Shop for Food

Ever go shopping when you’re hungry? Then you know why people buy things like chocolate covered artichokes. Anything sounds good when you’re starving. When you’re hungry it is not the time to hit the supermarket. You won’t make any kind of rational decision about food. Much better: go after you’ve eaten when your choices won’t be dictated by a growling stomach and a craving brain.

You can extrapolate this tip for eating out. I always send back the bread when I eat out, but if I’m starving, I’ll eat the bread basket! A cup of vegetable juice or a bowl of soup eaten an hour before you arrive at the restaurant is better than any appetite-suppressing diet pill on the market.

Research by Dr. Barbara Rolls at Penn State University shows that people who ate a simple 100-calorie salad before their meal spontaneously consumed 12% less calories overall. It seems to work just as well (or better) with soup—just make it broth based and loaded with vegetables.

#2: Clean Out Your Kitchen Cabinets (and/or Your Refrigerator)

I can’t tell you how many clients I’ve had who have lost weight just by doing this one thing! In fact, whenever I go up a few pounds and need to lose it, this trick has been my salvation.

For many people, the attitude about food—at least in the beginning, before they’ve really adopted this new Way of Life—is this: if it’s there, I’m gonna eat it. (Remember the old joke, “I’m on the seafood diet. I see food, I eat it!”? Well, it’s like that.)

The same is true of alcohol which can spike your blood sugar, reduce your inhibitions and cause you to eat even more.

Since a lot of our self-sabotage happens at night when defenses are down (with television snacking or even midnight refrigerator raids) the best defense is a good offense. If it ain’t there, you can’t eat (or drink) it. So get it out of there.
That’s not to say you couldn’t get dressed, get in the car, go to the 24 hour convenience store and buy some junk food (or a couple beers), but most of us won’t go that far even for a carb or sugar fix. We will, however, go as far as our freezer.

So dump the junk from your house and give yourself an advantage. I call it “bullet-proofing your kitchen”. If you live with other people and this isn’t really practical, try sectioning off a part of the fridge for your stuff (and theirs), thinking of the sections as truly separate, and pretend you’re living with roommates who will freak out if you eat their stuff.

#3: Stop Watching Television (or Cut Back)

I know it seems like heresy to suggest this, but study after study has linked increased TV watching with expanding waistlines, not to mention the development of childhood obesity. No one is quite sure exactly why, but it’s true.

Speculation has ranged from the obvious (more TV watching equals less activity, more TV watching equals more snacking); to slightly more subtle (the number of overt cues and signals to eat that come with the commercials). Even the esoteric has been postulated, like the idea that certain brain states induced by staring aimlessly at the tube might be linked to a general slow-down of the metabolism.

Whatever. The bottom line is: you watch more, you tend to be fatter.

Since most of us might find a no-TV diet a little extreme, how about just cutting back? Try picking a few absolute favorite shows and then sticking with them. Watch them, enjoy them, then shut the damned thing off.

And for bonus well-being points, try turning the TV off when no one is watching it. That background noise is taking up space in your brain and attention—even if you’re not aware of it—that could be put to much better use.

#4: Don’t Do Anything Else While You Eat, Instead Eat Slowly and Savor Every Bite

The number one enemy of weight loss is mindless eating. Nothing contributes to mindless eating like multi-tasking, especially while scarfing down food. This goes back to the whole thing about watching TV while you eat. When you eat in front of the TV, you’re barely conscious of what you’re eating or how much. You simply shovel it in while your mind is elsewhere (or, given some typical television fare, more likely nowhere).

Put this together with the well-documented fact that people tend to eat what’s in front of them and don’t stop till it’s gone, and you’ve got a recipe for disaster, at least if weight loss is your goal.

If you want to help yourself lose weight, pick a time for dinner, sit down at the table, and don’t do anything else but eat. Speak or converse if you like, but don’t read, don’t watch TV, don’t listen to the news, just actually try being present for the main activity—eating. Savor. Enjoy. Chew. Eat slowly. Concentrate.

Experience.

In other words, be present.

Try to bring mindfulness and consciousness to the table when it comes to eating. This helps reduce some of the automatic, unthinking eating that takes place when you’ve got your mind on other things. The more you can do this, the better, and the less likely you are to consume food while you barely notice that you’re consuming it!

Another tip that you can file under “grandmother knew best” is to eat slowly. The fact is that chewing your food slowly and frequently, putting your fork down between bites, and actually enjoying what you’re eating can help you lose weight. Here’s why...

The brain doesn’t really get the message “Hey, he’s full!” from the stomach until about twenty minutes into the meal. That’s how long it takes for the hormone Cholecystokinin (CCK)—the hormone that is released in
the small intestine when our stomachs are full and we’ve had enough food—to do its job and send the signal “enough” to the brain.

Fast eaters frequently overeat before their brain gets the message that the stomach is full and that they’re not really hungry anymore. You can go a long way toward enhancing “natural” appetite control by taking advantage of your body’s excellent communication network, but you need to give it enough time to work! Also, chewing, eating slowly and actually experiencing your food works against the kind of unconscious, mindless eating that put weight on in the first place.

Eat slowly and savor every bite, and there’s way less chance you’ll “accidentally” down an extra thousand calories and way more chance you’ll develop the neglected skill of paying attention. Your partner/mate/wife/husband will love you for it, and you may discover a whole level of experience to eating that you never noticed before because you weren’t really there.

#5: “Listening to Your Body” is Not Always a Good Idea

Face it: our bodies lie. They’re especially deceitful if we’ve been on the Standard American Diet for a long time. If we were back in the caveman days, eating only the food that was available to us by hunting, fishing or gathering, our bodies would tell us exactly what we needed. Our sweet tooth, for example, was originally a great survival mechanism. It caused us to seek out sweet tasting plants (which were generally safe to eat), and fruits, which we needed because, unlike most animals, we humans do not make our own vitamin C.

But that sweet tooth that once saved our lives has become quite the liability.

Now it causes us to roam the markets of the 24-hour supermarket looking for cookies and ice cream. Our foolproof appetite regulators, like CCK responds to protein and fat. It doesn’t recognize carbohydrate so well, which is why it’s so easy to down ten bowls of cereal while watching Grey’s Anatomy reruns.

So “listening to our body” may not always be such a great idea as we can’t count on it to tell us the truth, especially in the beginning of this new way of eating. It is often telling us what we want, which is a conditioned response, and confusing us by making us believe that it’s what we need. They’re not necessarily the same thing.

We need to reeducate our bodies to tell us the truth, and we do that the same way we teach our kids to be honest, by training. Once our bodies have been reconditioned to respond to real food we can begin trusting them to give us reliable signals. Right now, most of the signals that we get telling us what we “need” to eat are the biological equivalent of spam.

“Listening to your body” is a great piece of advice, but not until you’ve separated the junk mail from the real messages.

#6: Bust Cravings with this Amino Acid

A tablespoon of powdered glutamine, an amino acid, sweetened with Xylitol and dissolved in a tablespoon or two of heavy cream (or half and half) will disarm even the most demanding sugar craving.

That’s how Atkins himself used glutamine to quench cravings in his clinical practice. “The immediate desire to eat something sweet will pass”, he said. “For a reference attesting to its efficiency, ask any of the eight thousand Atkins Center patients for whom I have prescribed it!”
Powdered glutamine can be used right out of the jar with nothing but water. It’s got a long and noble history of being used to combat cravings for both sugar and alcohol (the two are more than a little connected!) Glutamine is an alternate source of glucose available to the brain, plus it has the added advantage of getting there quickly!

You can open a capsule and put it under your tongue and you’ll feel the crave-reducing effect within minutes. Or better yet, put a heaping spoonful in cream as noted above.

#7: Keep a Journal

The overwhelming majority of people who are successful at losing weight on any program routinely keep food diaries. In fact, journaling is one of the key behaviors consistently cited as a winning strategy by people who were successful in losing weight (at least 30 pounds kept off for at least one year) in the National Weight Control Registry. It’s also probably the one technique that every specialist—no matter where they stand on the “dieting” spectrum—recommends. Here’s why:

1. You can’t change something unless you know what it is you’re changing. Keeping records of what you’re eating allows you to see what’s working and what’s not.
2. The journal (or food diary) allows you to track changes in your eating behavior against changes in your weight (and energy, and mood, and sleep) and helps you to draw connections.
3. Writing in a food journal causes you to be aware of what you’re eating, which in turn keeps you rigorously honest.

In addition, for those who are so inclined, the journal can also be a terrific tool for self-discovery, and has been for many great artists throughout time. You can add recollections of the days’ events, as well as notations about your feelings, your moods, your resentments, your anxieties and your joys, but don’t feel you have to. All you really need to do to make this work, from a weight loss perspective, is to keep a record of what you eat and drink—every single day. You don’t have to do it forever, but the more you do it the more successful you are likely to be.

**Bonus points:** Dr. Deirdre Barrett, a Harvard psychologist, weight loss expert and author of the excellent book, *Waistland*, strongly recommends that you add one more component to your food journal: a record of your thoughts about food. Nothing increases mindfulness and shows up false beliefs like writing them down.

“Some faulty thinking becomes transparent to the client just by writing it down”, says Dr. Barrett. “For instance, if every time someone goes to get coffee at a donut shop, they end up with at least one donut, or if reasoning that they can eat a large lunch as long as they eat a small supper never actually results in the latter.”

Writing down your thoughts about food and your eating patterns helps to shine a light on some of the most insidious (and destructive) patterns that are often hidden from consciousness.

#8: Don’t Get Too Tired, Angry, Hungry, Lonely or Bored

There’s an old New Yorker cartoon that shows a person eating a pint of ice cream and saying to her friend, “I’m not overeating. I’m self-medicating!”

Emotional eating is a huge factor in weight gain, as most people know.
In many ways, it is virtually impossible to separate the emotional component from the physiological components. All of the above states of being: anger, lack of sleep, hunger, loneliness and boredom—not to mention anxiety, fear, nervousness and stress—have been known to trigger overeating, nervous eating, comfort eating or binge eating. The best cure in this case is a healthy dose of prevention.

I find that staying active and staving off boredom are easy ways to keep yourself from overeating or giving in to emotional binges. The main thing is to find something (or some things) you love and do it. Any of the following are great options, but make up your own list:

- Walk more—anywhere. Try to get up to 5,000 or 10,000 steps a day if you can.
- Play in the park with your kids (or your grandkids or your dog or even by yourself!).
- Plant some flowers or vegetables.
- Take up a martial art (Tai Chi is great!).
- Try yoga.
- Make love.
- Do that “spring cleaning” you’ve been putting off.
- Sing and dance (you can always shut the blinds if you don’t want anyone to see).
- Get involved with a local community group in an area of interest.
- Paint, draw, sculpt, or take up any other art or craft of interest.

These are just a few ideas. Your options are endless. Just look for things that bring you joy and DO them. Which leads me to my next tip...

### #9: Treat Yourself to a Non-Food Treat

Remember, changing your lifestyle is about breaking some old habits and replacing them with more empowering ones. And one of the habits of thinking most in need of overhaul is the one that tells you that food is your only reward and comfort. That doesn’t mean there won’t be a place in your life for comfort food or recreational eating. But you need to increase your repertoire of things that make you feel good!

So start looking for other things that make you feel good besides food, and start finding time to do them! Give them to yourself as a reward, either for reaching a weight loss goal, or just for the hell of it. It might be a trip to a day spa, a manicure, some time on the golf course, reading a beach novel or going to a museum.

Think outside the box. Better yet, take a tip from Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way*, and make a “play date” with yourself. Just you, doing whatever you want, no agenda, no greater purpose than to have fun. It doesn’t have to be an all-day deal.

It would be really great if you could come up with a number of little things you could do that don’t take a lot of time and that can be incorporated into your daily life, like a bath or some time meditating or even listening to one absolutely great song from the disco era, or reading “People” magazine. Whatever. Doesn’t matter.

When you feel the need to compulsively dig into the cookie jar, start to train yourself to substitute one of these non-food treats. You’ll be conditioning a new repertoire of behaviors that has nothing to do with food.
#10: Focus On the Weight You’ve Kept Off, and Remember “The Bowden Equation”

Focusing on the weight you have lost is a gem of a tip that doesn’t get nearly the play it deserves. I can’t tell you the number of times I have seen a weight loss effort bite the dust because the person continued to focus on how far she had to go rather than how far she’d come.

Many studies have shown that weight loss expectations are greatly out of sync with what can realistically be attained. For example, most obesity programs consider the loss of 10 percent of original body weight a success, but when clients who are entering the program are asked what they think would be a successful outcome, they typically say that anything less than 25 percent would be a failure.

This does not mean you should set your sights low—not at all. But if you’re expecting to lose seven pounds a week, consistently, you are going to be very, very disappointed, and if you are disappointed you are going to feel like you failed, and if you feel like you’re failing you’re much more likely to give up.

Here’s Dr. Jonny’s famous “Bowden Equation” which seems to sum the whole thing up: disappointment equals the difference between expectation and reality. If you focus on the weight you have lost so far—even if it’s a pound or two—you will be way better off in the long run, and much more likely to keep going.

Even better, focus on the non-scale related benefits, such as how you feel, lack of bloat, increased energy, well-being, lack of headaches, no more brain fog, or best of all lost inches and a changing shape. Remember, you lose weight exactly the same way you put it on—one pound at a time.

#11: Expect Stalls and Plateaus

There is no one on the planet who has lost weight who hasn’t experienced stalls, plateaus or both. They’re a natural part of weight loss. Think of them as your body’s way of “catching up” with the changes you’re introducing to your lifestyle. Kind of like a “reset” of the thermostat.

They can occur for a million different reasons but the important point is that they do and will occur, and you will be better off if you know that going into it so that you don’t get thrown when they do. If you’re going on a cross country hike, it’s better to expect rain and take along a raincoat than to be ill-prepared and have to turn around. Expect plateaus and they won’t throw you as much.

And, finally, if you fall off the wagon...

Don’t let it be a big deal. Acknowledge that it happened, and just get back on, beginning with the very next meal.

Hope you enjoyed these tips, and, more importantly, hope you were able to find something of value in them.

And here’s one more tip at all times. It’s not one of the 11 in the “special report”, but it’s probably the most important thing of all, and you should remember it at all times.

Ready?

Everybody’s different.

No one program, no one diet, no one hack, no one supplement program, no one anything works for everyone. You are unique—metabolically, hormonally, psychologically, and in every other way.

Honor that. Celebrate it.