

Calories: What Do Our Bodies Use Them For?

Before Getting Started...

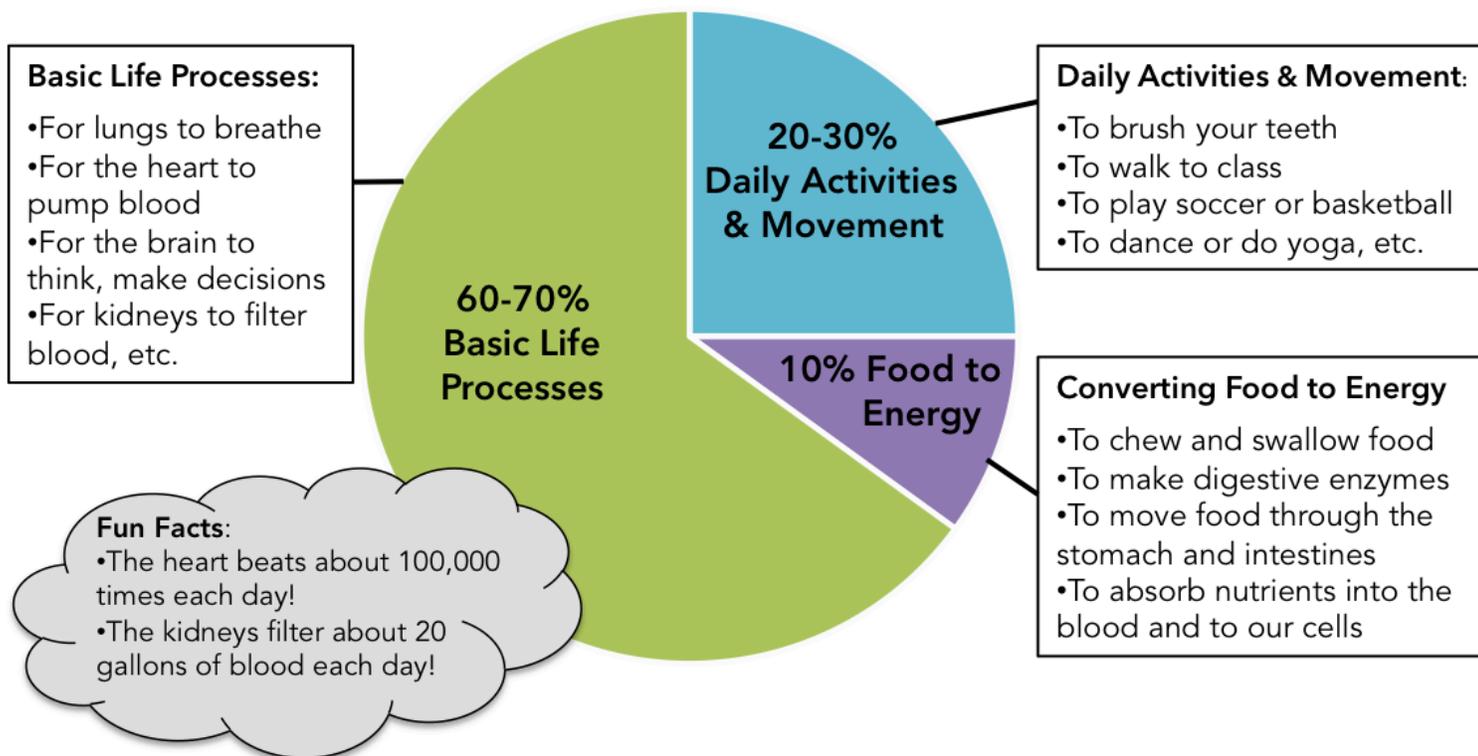
Take a few minutes to discuss the following questions with your nutritionist:

- What words come to mind when you hear the word “calorie”?
- What do you think our bodies use calories for?
- About how many calories do you think someone your age needs to stay healthy?

The Facts on Calories:

Just like we use inches to measure how tall we are, calories are used to measure the amount of energy we get from food. Calories fuel our bodies the same way that gas fuels cars. The calories we get from foods and drinks provide energy to every cell and organ in the body.

What are Calories Used for in the Body?



How Many Calories Does My Body Need?

Since calories are essentially energy from food and drinks, calories are referred to as energy for the remainder of this handout.

Most of the energy from food and drinks is used for basic life functions like breathing, digesting, thinking, and keeping your organs functioning... even if you lie in bed all day!

A small percentage of energy from food and drinks is used for daily activities, sports, and other types of exercise to move your muscles and refuel them.

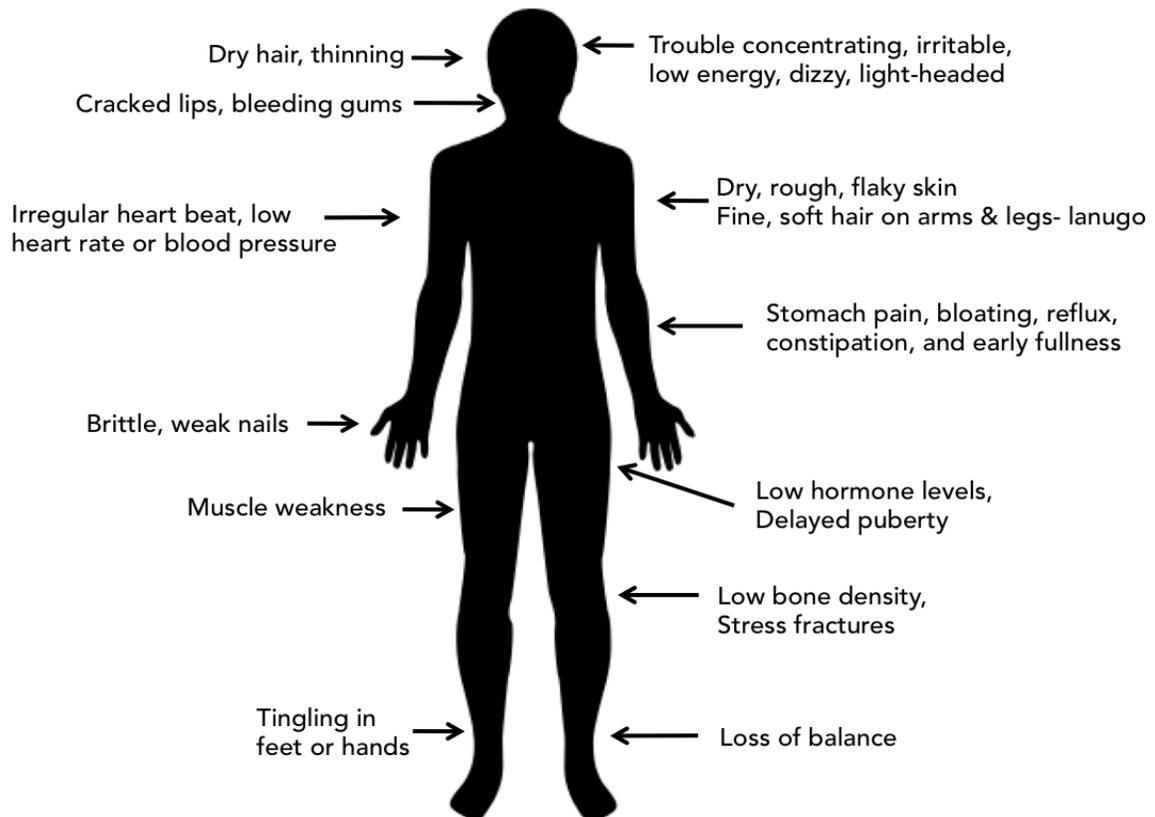
When teens have delayed growth or development, they may need even more energy from food and drinks compared to someone of a similar age to catch up on growth and development and still be able to support basic functions and daily activities.

Everyone's energy needs are different and depend on many factors like your age, gender, body size, whether you are growing, and how much muscle you have.

What Happens If I Don't Get Enough Energy?

When you don't get enough energy from food and drinks to support basic life functions and daily activities (also called *malnutrition*), your body breaks down its own energy stores- fat, muscles, and organs like your brain, heart, and liver.

Signs of Inadequate Energy (Malnutrition)



Fortunately, many of these symptoms can be reversed by meeting your nutrition needs!

What Does This Mean For Me?

Take a few minutes to think through the information shared in this handout and answer the questions listed below:

1. How do you think the energy you get from food compares to your body's energy needs?
2. Have you noticed any signs that your body may not be getting enough energy from food?
3. What are two or three ways you feel comfortable making changes to your eating?

References:

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