

# Burn Calories Using NEAT - Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis

- By Traci Breazeale

**N.E.A.T.** stands for Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis. Dr. James Levine is credited for his research and findings on NEAT. According to Dr. Levine, "You can expend calories in one two ways. One is to go to the gym and the other is through all the activities of daily living called NEAT (Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis). It appears that NEAT is far more important for calorie-burning than exercise in nearly everyone."



Is it possible that in today's high-tech, information overloaded society we have completely passed over this simplified concept in search of The Holy Grail? Are all the toys, bells and whistles really necessary to help the average weight loss seeker achieve their goals?

If losing weight is really a matter of calories in vs. calories out (which it is by the most basic standard then the average person who has a full and busy life outside the gym needs to find the easiest and most natural way to accomplish the NEAT Factor.

If "moving more" were as simple as it sounds we certainly wouldn't have a diet and exercise industry that is making more money than any other industry for the last 4 decades, nor would we be the most obese ridden society in all of history, nor would we be suffering all time high death rates from diseases that are related directly back to excess weight and body fat. Life just isn't "that simple".



The phrase, "Being Active Naturally" was actually coined based on the NEAT Factor. It boils down to an easy comparison.

Joe comes home from his desk job at night, eats dinner and goes directly to the recliner to catch up on DVR events.

Bob comes home from his desk job, eats dinner, takes the dogs for a walk, mows the yard and then sits down to watch 60 minutes of TV.

If everything else in Joe and Bob's day were exactly the same and they had the identical inner "burn" going because of identical muscle mass and weight and thermogenesis (metabolic process) and they ingested exactly the same calories, Bob would be a leaner person in a few weeks simply because of his NEAT Factor.

Think of the big pedometer craze. It's simply another way to focus our attention on moving more. If you are currently taking about 3,000 steps a day in your regular day and you start taking 10,000 steps a day, keep your calories the same as they

have been, keep all other activity exactly as it has been, you will burn more calories which will result in one of the following:

- **Lose Weight**
- **Maintain Weight**
- **Stop Gaining Weight**

The greatest challenge I see in getting clients focused on NEAT is they often times lack an overall accurate picture of what they currently eat (calories in ) and what a normal week of activity already entails (calories out). If you think you have an active lifestyle because you work and have 2 toddlers - you may be over estimating your level of activity. A possible scenario:

You have a desk job for 8-12 hours a day and come home to children at night. You are obviously fatigued and you feel like your day is still going strong and it is- emotionally. But from a NEAT perspective it might be sedentary (reading, holding, rocking, playing board games). This kind of activity also often entails eating "snack" foods which have calories regardless of how healthy the food may be.

The problem most of us face is that we are mentally fatigued long before we have physically spent any real calories in a day. For those that are naturally active all day the calories we eat tend to be well over what it takes to sustain that level of activity. This is partially true because we are so busy we forget to count all the grab n go calories. We also tend to grab foods that don't sustain us, so we eat more and more calories to get an energy surge or satisfy hunger. Eating nutrient rich foods solves this but as we know that's not always easy and its rarely "fun". This is why planned exercise has become the only real way for most people to lose weight.

Another reason that NEAT lifestyles alone may not work in helping people lose weight is, caloric intake. **You cannot out exercise a poor diet. That's not just some cliché' - its fact!** If you have ever used a heart rate monitor or such devises, that tell you how many calories you've burned and compared it to the calories consumed at the birthday party this weekend or the Mexican food you ate at the restaurant Friday night or the calories in the creamer you put in your coffee every day- You'll understand this fact. If you have ever used a treadmill or stair master and set the controls for calories burned (they aren't real accurate but it's a starting point) - you'll understand. My husband comes back from the community gym nearly every day mad because his cardio warm up only burned 100-120 calories! On his 230# frame that's basically nothing yet his brain says to him all day long: "You worked out, you can eat more!" It's a defeating cycle!

#### **Here are a few tidbits about calories in and calories expended:**

- 2-pack Hostess Ding Dongs = **368 calories**
- Canned Pink Lemonade = **150 calories**
- Quarter Pounder w/ Cheese = **580 calories**

If this were your lunch today you'd have consumed 1098 calories just for lunch.... Let's see how we'd have to burn that if you were about 130 pounds:

- Heavy House Cleaning 60 minutes = **244 calories**
- High Impact Step aerobics 60 minutes = **270 calories**
- Gardening 60 minutes = **165 calories**

- Golf using cart 3 hours = **580 calories**

We've burned 1259 calories and it **only took us 6 hours to burn lunch calories!** - Unless of course you ate / drank during the activities or snuck in French fries that you didn't report!

In my opinion, your best bet to lose weight is a multi faceted strategy. Be aware of opportunities to move more than you already do in your day.

- If you sit at a desk- every single hour get up and walk around for 5-10 minutes
- Take the stairs
- Park as far as you can from your destination and walk
- Take ¼ of your allotted lunch break and walk - eat then walk or walk first and then eat. You can still socialize - they just have to walk with you!
- NEVER go from dinner table to living room chair! Make it a point to spend at least 30 minutes immediately following dinner to be on your feet and moving around.

If a pedometer or heart rate monitor will help you move more- BUY IT! USE IT! If it won't help you then save your money and put sticky notes up on your desk as reminders, set a cell phone alarm to go off, have an email reminder pop up on your screen- whatever works for your lifestyle.

Cardiovascular exercise (cardio) is perfect for releasing stress and burning calories. If you find an activity you love you'll feel wonderful doing it and therefore more likely to be consistent.

- Classes like Jazzercise, Zumba, Kickboxing
- Home Workout DVDs- I'm a HUGE fan of these! No Excuses- lace up and press play!
- Playing tag with the kids
- Shooting Hoops in your driveway
- Racking leaves, using a Push Mower instead of a gardener!
- Cleaning out a closet
- Dancing
- I've been known to clean my house wearing a 10 pound weighted vest!



Aside from the aesthetics of weight lifting or strength training and the sport it has become, muscle is a sure fire way to burn more calories while the body isn't working out. Muscle is built after the actual workout, while the body is recovering. The simplified version of building muscle is this: When you lift weights appropriately (seek professional guidance if you're new to this) you will tear down the muscle, when you allow the muscle to rest it works on rebuilding itself. The process of repairing and rebuilding itself causes your body to work harder and to thus to burn more calories than it would if it wasn't going through this process. Once the muscle has recovered and has been built your body is working harder than normal to feed the new muscle growth- this also burns more calories. When you consistently repeat this process you create what we call a Fat Burning Machine inside your body. This is the reason a person with higher Lean Body Mass (muscle) must eat more calories in a day than a person who doesn't have this going on inside their body. Muscle is they

"magic" that so many of us turn to when there simply aren't enough hours in the day to "cardio ourselves" lean or thin!

- Lift weight 3-4 times per week - but it must be done correctly. There really IS science behind this so don't "wing it" and get zero results! There is a tried and true method to building muscle!

## **Eat!**

- Eat foods in their most natural state possible
- Learn how many calories your favorite foods have and learn how long it takes to burn those same calories! (That alone might change your eating forever!)
- Eat in smaller quantities- tune in to feel satisfied versus feeling full (you aren't going to go for 10 days without the opportunity to eat again will you?)
- Eat foods that will give you more energy not cause "crashes"

Remember life is always about balance. Some days you'll be more active than others, some days you'll have a birthday to celebrate and you'll enjoy a piece of cake. A healthy life means a healthy mind, healthy body and healthy spirit. For the science behind NEAT, you can access [Dr. Levine's research](#) for more information.