# Calorie counting and fasting: The dual narrative of weight loss risks and transformations



During Eating Disorders Week, which runs from February 24 to March 2, dietician and eating disorder specialist Arti Dhokia has raised concerns over the popular practice of calorie counting as a method of weight loss. Speaking to the Birmingham Mail, Dhokia emphasised that while calorie counting is one of the oldest and seemingly straightforward ways to manage weight, it can lead to negative health consequences and contribute to unhealthy relationships with food.

According to Beat Eating Disorders, over a million individuals in the UK are struggling with eating disorders, highlighting the prevalence of the issue. Dhokia stated, "Calorie counting as a diet is one of the oldest methods for weight loss. Understandably, it’s usually the first way people try to lose weight." She acknowledged that while calorie counting can yield results for some, excessively fixating on calorie intake can detrimentally affect one's overall health and lead to disordered eating habits.

The recommended average daily calorie intake is around 2,500 for men and 2,000 for women. Dhokia suggested, "The problem arises when people are fixated on their daily calorie intake to the point that it affects their thoughts and feelings about food." Not all individuals who track their calories face the risk of developing disordered eating, but those contemplating a calorie deficit for weight loss are advised to seek guidance from a qualified dietitian for alternative strategies. These may include making simple adjustments to portion sizes and reducing the frequency of high-fat foods.

Dhokia also emphasised the importance of recognising symptoms of eating disorders, such as negative thoughts about body image, insufficient food intake, excessive exercising, and mood disturbances. Physical symptoms can include feelings of faintness and digestive problems. Dr Rupa Parmar, medical director at Midland Health, echoed the need for support and understanding when it comes to eating disorders and highlighted the importance of seeking help without stigma.

In a separate yet equally compelling narrative, investigative journalist Donal Macintyre recently documented his experience of undertaking a 23-day fast. During this period, Macintyre consumed only black coffee and water, claiming to have lost 41 pounds (approximately 19 kg). On reflecting upon the staggering amount of weight lost in a brief time frame, he acknowledged the scepticism that some readers expressed regarding his transformation. Macintyre explained that while he felt transformed, the rapid change had resulted in logistical challenges such as adjusting his wardrobe and maintaining continuity for his upcoming television projects.

Macintyre's fast began on his 59th birthday, motivated by a distressing self-image he encountered shortly after Christmas. "I was FAT – and there was no denying it," he stated. The psychological and social impacts of body weight also featured in his narrative, revealing that he felt less visible and less recognised in public due to his weight gain.

The experience of fasting, which Macintyre described as challenging yet manageable, has led to significant physical and emotional changes. After completing the fast, he is gradually reintroducing solid foods into his diet while under medical supervision regarding his health's transition post-fast, which he describes as vital. He is optimistic about further improvements in his well-being, noting increased energy and focus, and aims to reach a healthy target weight.

His journey has been met with a fair degree of public interest, and he believes that shared stories of personal transformation can inspire others in their pursuits related to health and well-being. Although mindful that not everyone may undertake such drastic measures, Macintyre emphasised that personal change is achievable through commitment and self-control.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://midlandhealth.co.uk/mental-health/paediatric-eating-disorders/> - This URL supports the discussion on eating disorders and the importance of seeking professional help, echoing Dr. Rupa Parmar's emphasis on support and understanding for those affected.
* <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/> - This URL corroborates the prevalence of eating disorders in the UK, as mentioned by Beat Eating Disorders, highlighting over a million individuals struggling with these conditions.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/understanding-calories/> - This URL provides information on calorie intake and management, supporting Arti Dhokia's discussion on the potential negative impacts of excessive calorie counting.
* <https://www.bupa.co.uk/health-information/nutrition/diet-and-weight-loss> - This URL offers insights into healthy weight loss strategies, aligning with Dhokia's advice on seeking guidance from qualified dietitians for alternative methods beyond calorie counting.
* <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/expert-answers/calorie-counting/faq-20415171> - This URL provides further information on calorie counting, supporting the notion that while it can be effective for some, it may lead to unhealthy relationships with food for others.
* <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/fasting-for-weight-loss> - This URL discusses fasting as a weight loss method, similar to Donal Macintyre's experience with a 23-day fast, highlighting both the potential benefits and challenges associated with such practices.