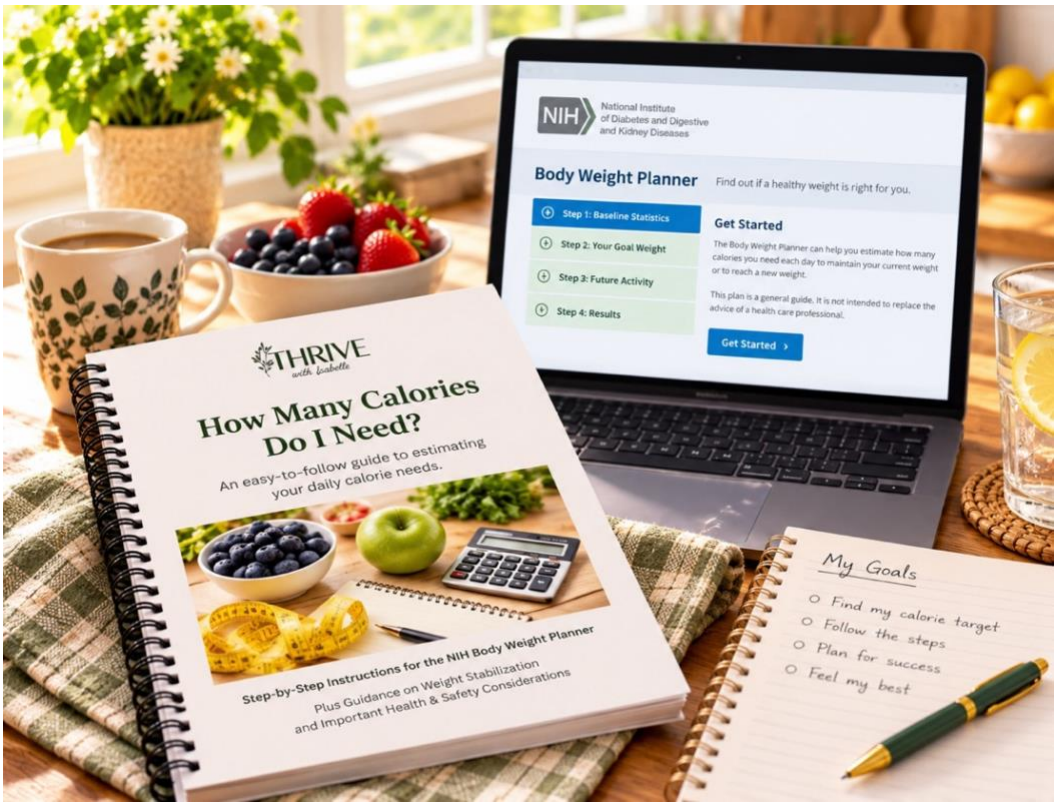
How Many Calories Do I Need?

An easy-to-follow guide to estimating your daily calorie needs.



Quick Start: Find Your Daily Calorie Needs

1. **Open the NIH Weight Planner**. Follow these six steps or click for illustrated instructions.
2. **Enter Your Information:** Current weight, sex, age, height, and activity level.
3. **Enter Your Goal Weight:** Make sure it differs from your current weight.
4. **Choose Your Target Date:** Allow roughly one week per pound you want to lose. This accounts for Thrive's 8-week weight-loss phases (approximately 1–2 pounds per week) and 4-week stabilization periods, when the goal is to maintain your progress. Actual results vary.
5. **Enter Planned Activity Changes:** Otherwise, leave at 0%.
6. **Find Your Calorie Target:** Use "Calories to reach your goal" as your estimated daily weight-loss target.

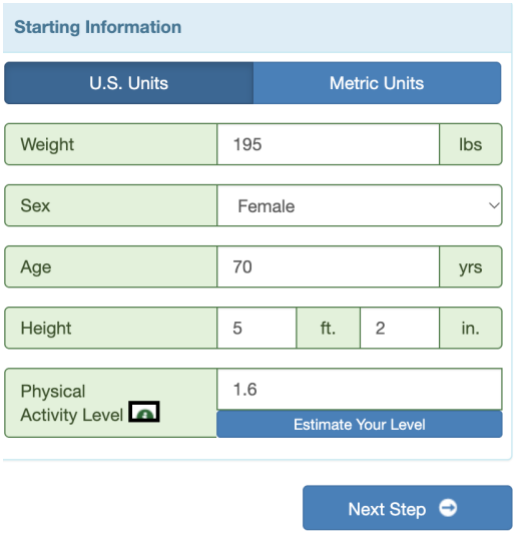
Next: Thrive meals provide approximately 1,300 calories daily. If you need more, visit our Thrive Calorie Calculator page for additional calorie guidance and food choices.

Need more help? See the illustrated instructions below, along with stabilization and safety guidance.

Screen-by-Screen Guidance for Using the NIH Planner

Screen 1: Baseline Statistics

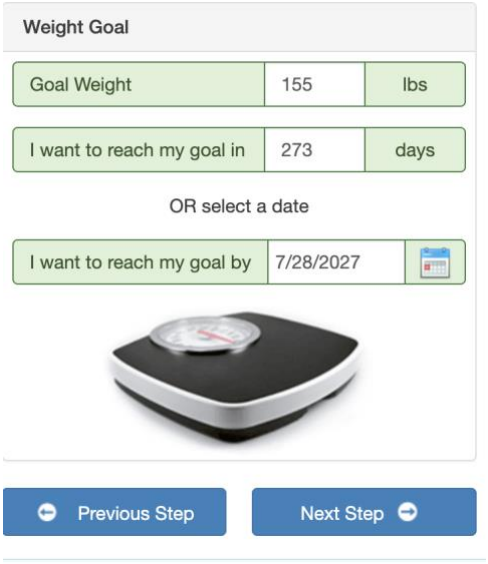
- **Enter Your Information**: Enter your current weight, sex, age, and height.
- **Select Your Activity Level:** Click **"Estimate Your Level"**. Choose the level that best reflects your typical daily activities, including time spent on your feet, walking, or doing physical tasks.
- Click **"Next Step."**



Screen 2 on next page.

Screen 2: Your Goal Weight & Target Date

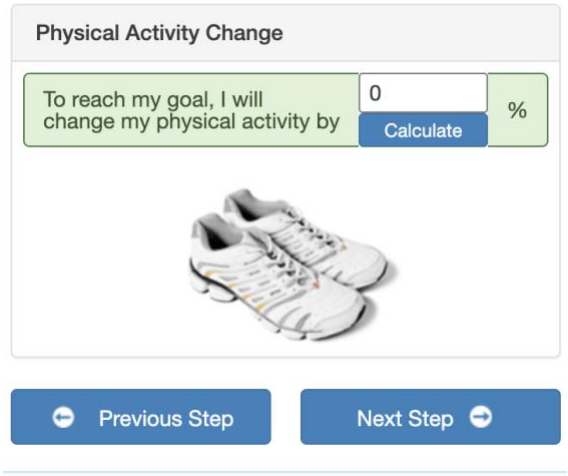
- **Enter Your Goal Weight — Important!** The planner may default to your current weight. Be sure to enter your actual goal weight, or your calorie estimates will be incorrect.
- **Calculate Your Target Date:** Thrive includes 8-week weight-loss phases, when you may lose approximately 1–2 pounds per week, followed by 4-week stabilization periods to maintain your progress. Allow roughly one week for each pound you want to lose when estimating your target date. This accounts for both weight-loss and stabilization periods, with weight loss occurring during the 8-week phases. Actual results vary.
- **Find Your Target Date:** For example, if you want to lose 40 pounds, search Google for "40 weeks from today." Enter that date using the planner's calendar icon. The number of days updates automatically.
- Click **"Next Step."**



Screen 3 on next page.

Screen 3: Future Activity Changes

- **Planning to Increase Your Activity?** Enter your estimated percentage increase only if you expect to become more active. Otherwise, leave it at **0%**.
- Click **"Next Step."**

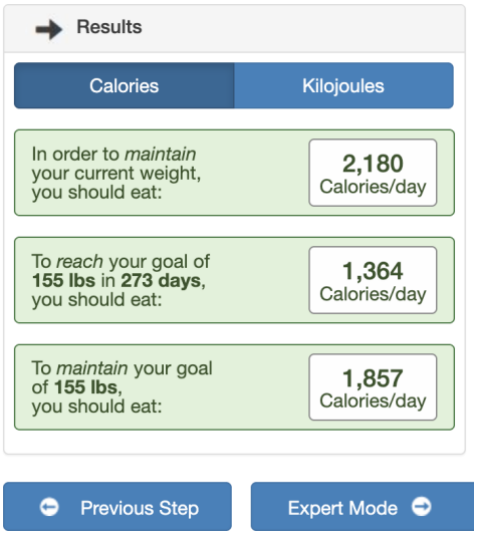


Screen 4 on next page.

Screen 4: Your Results

The planner provides three estimated daily calorie amounts:

- **Calories to maintain your current weight:** Your estimated daily needs to maintain your weight today.
- **Calories to reach your goal:** Your estimated daily calorie target for weight loss based on your chosen timeline.
- **Calories to maintain your goal weight:** Your estimated daily needs once you've reached your final goal weight. During Thrive's 4-week stabilization periods, you'll focus on maintaining the weight you've reached at the end of each 8-week phase.



Stabilizing Your Weight Between Thrive Cycles

After completing eight weeks of weight loss, your goal during the four-week stabilization period is to maintain the weight you've reached.

- **If you're still losing:** Increase your daily intake by 100 calories and maintain that amount while monitoring your weight. If you're still losing, increase by another 100 calories until your weight stabilizes.
- **If your weight increases by more than 3 pounds:** Using your calculated daily calorie target, return to your 8-Week Meal Plan for approximately one week or until you've returned to your starting stabilization weight. Then resume stabilizing.

Thrive's **3-Pound Rule** helps you maintain your progress by addressing small weight increases before they become larger gains. Use your weight trend rather than reacting to a single day's fluctuation.

Important Health and Safety Guidelines

- **What NIH, ADA, and Harvard Recommend**: Established weight-loss guidance commonly uses 1,200–1,500 calories daily for women and 1,500–1,800 for men. As a general safety precaution, avoid going below 1,200 calories for women or 1,500 for men without professional medical supervision. Individual needs may be higher.
- **Listen to Your Body**: Eating too little can cause fatigue, dizziness, and inadequate nutrition. If you feel weak, dizzy, or unwell, seek medical guidance rather than pushing through the symptoms.
- **Medical Consultation**: Consult your physician or a registered dietitian before making significant dietary changes, especially if you have a medical condition or take medications affected by changes in food intake.
- **NIH Planner Eligibility**: The NIH Body Weight Planner is intended for adults 18 and older and is not designed for use during pregnancy or breastfeeding.

Sources: *National Institutes of Health (NHLBI); American Diabetes Association, Standards of Care in Diabetes—2026*

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