

What Should I Eat?

by

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INTRODUCTION

This is the third article in our Healthy, Fit for wealth lifestyle series and as I reiterated to Bill in the gym today its the most important in terms of achieving our body weight target. In the previous article we determined our target body weight, and with help of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) SuperTracker website, estimated how much energy we should eat each day to gradually achieve this target. In this article we will establish what foods we should eat and how to modify the food intake and exercise levels to ensure the program delivers the expected 0.5 kg of weight loss per week. You will probably be surprised by how much food you will be eating and yet still losing weight. Much of the problem is simply consuming high energy junk foods like sugary drinks and alcohol; snack foods like cookies, chocolates and chips; and poor food choices like pizza and deep fried foods. Once these are eliminated from the diet and healthy foods are consumed you will not really feel like you are on a diet, just eating sensibly and this is the secret to a healthy lifestyle that is sustainable over the long term.

A NEW RELATIONSHIP TO FOOD

Attention to detail and being very strict with your food intake is absolutely essential to the success of the program. Often it is the little things, the extra cookies that are eaten with the coffee, the piece of cake or pizza consumed to be social with your friends, the couple of beers drunk with colleagues after work etc. It is these extra consumptions of junk foods that need to be sacrificed in order to attain your weight loss target. Most people imagine that the real challenge to losing weight is found in the fitness centre. Having to lift large weights or run long distances. But in truth the real challenge in losing weight is fought in the kitchen. The capacity to consistently eat moderate portions of healthy food is all that is required. To achieve a long term sustainable body weight you need to establish a new relationship to food. You need to understand that food is absolutely essential for the effective functioning of your body. It should not be viewed as a means of pleasure, or an essential element to social interaction. There are many things you can do in life to please and spoil yourself, but food should not be one of them.

Over Consumption - Gluttony

Often healthy food is seen to be boring and hence the diet is hard to maintain as many people crave junk food and sweets. This is generally because most people over-eat. If you are in a well-balanced food and exercise plan, and are not over-eating, you often feel a little hungry at meal time. This allows you to really appreciate the taste of the healthy food; the sweet taste of oranges; the crispness of fresh salads; the texture of whole grain bread. Healthy food tastes great when you are a little hungry and this is part of the secret of a healthy lifestyle. Learn to enjoy healthy food by not over-consuming. Then you really appreciate the food you eat and you are in the right relationship to food as an essential source of nutrients, not as a means of pleasure.

SPECIFIC MEDICAL ISSUES

A small percentage of people will have specific medical problems that will impact upon their food options, such as an under-active thyroid gland, lactate intolerance, diabetes etc and hence prior to commencing the program everyone should have a full medical check up to determine if there are any medical problems that need to be factored into your specific program. If such factors are required then it is advised that your food plan be developed in consultation with your medical doctor and nutritionists.

THE FOOD PLAN

In the previous article we determined the amount of energy that you should consume each and every day. This will be individual, but in most cases the food intake value will be somewhere between 1600 to 2400 calories per day. When this number was determined, the USDA SuperTracker website (www.supertracker.usda.gov) would have provided you with some general information on how best to consume this amount of food. Thus there will be some general recommendations in relation to how much of each food group to consume each day such as grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, protein etc. This is useful information that you should save and use as a resource. There are many diets that can be used as a starting point. I have chosen the USDA as it is the most respected dietary institution in the world and has been setting the internationally accepted food standards for the past 100 years.

On the USDA website a meal by meal 7 day food plan for a 2000 calorie energy intake is provided. This is directly access through the following link: www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/Sample_Menus-2000Cals-DG2010.pdf. The title is "Sample Menus for 2000 Calorie Food Pattern". This 7 day meal plan is developed around a well-balanced diet containing the recommended daily intakes of all the micro- and macro-nutrients. Download this document

as it will provide a good starting point to develop your personalized food plan. A wide variety of different food options are provided and it is recommended that you choose those that suit your personal tastes. For example, day 3 and 5 best suit me as I generally have cold cereal for breakfast, toasted sandwiches for lunch and soup and a salmon salad for dinner. However, as my recommended food intake is about 3000 calories, I need to increase the portion size and/or add some sensible food options to increase it to the required level. As stated in the USDAs 2000 Calorie Sample Menu plan “Use this 7-day menu as a motivational tool to help put a healthy eating pattern into practice, and to identify creative new ideas for healthy meals.” Every person is unique and it is likely the food plan will need to be individually tailored, within sensible parameters, to suit your individual needs.

Your Daily Food Intake

I recommend that you carefully examine the foods listed in the USDAs 7 day 2000 calorie food plan and determine a daily food intake from this plan that suits you. Make reasonable adjustments if your daily calorie intake is under or over the 2000 calorie level by adjusting portion size or adding or subtracting some healthy food items. Once a basic personalized food plan is developed I recommend entering all the foods into the USDAs SuperTracker website in the Food Tracker section (www.supertracker.usda.gov/foodtracker.aspx). This will provide the calorie information for every food item entered and also allow an analysis of your nutrient intake so you can see if sufficient amounts of protein, fruits, vegetables, vitamins and minerals are being consumed (click [Nutrient Intake Report](#) link on the SuperTracker website). It will also give you information on the calorie intake for each meal and the total energy intake for the whole day. Adjust the food eaten so that the target calorie intake is achieved and all the macro- and micro-nutrients are within the recommended nutrient intake levels.

The SuperTracker program is very useful and provided for free by the US government. It takes about 2 hours to enter all your details and food intake into the website and learn all the functions and available options and it is relatively easy to use. It allows you to examine what would happen if you changed the food options and by adding and adjusting various food items you will learn a great deal about the amount of calories that are in different foods. This increased knowledge about the energy value of various foods is one of the most important keys to healthy living and achieving a healthy weight. If you truly understood how many calories are contained in commonly eaten foods like chocolate, sugary drinks and alcohol you would not consume them. It is the fact that people are generally unaware of the calories in food and do not pay sufficient attention to their total food intake that they end up over-consuming and over-weight. My advice is to invest the time and energy into examining exactly what you are eating each day and this will provide the basis for achieving and sustaining a healthy body weight. The process may take some time initially, but over time you will find you will tend to eat similar types of healthy food each day and you will not need to pay such close attention to all the fine details. Eventually healthy eating will become natural and at this stage you are well on your way to achieving a healthy, fit and happy lifestyle.

Fine Tuning the Diet

The food plan is designed to be implemented in conjunction with regular exercise, which will be outlined in the next article. The system is designed for you to achieve a calorie deficit (calorie intake from food – calorie output through exercise) of about 500 calories per day. This will lead to a weekly weight loss of about 0.5 kg. The system will need to be fine tuned as each individual is different and will respond differently to the diet and exercise program. The vast majority of the fine tuning will involve modification to the diet, as exercise expends a relatively small amount of energy in comparison to the food intake, so most effort needs to be directed at the food intake side of the energy equation.

Every morning when you wake up you must weigh yourself, without any clothes, after going to the toilet, and record your body weight value. This is absolutely essential. It should be about the same time each morning, about 6-7 am. We are going to use this body weight value to fine tune the program. Morning body weight will vary depending on the state of hydration, hormonal fluctuations, what you have been eating, how much exercise etc and these values will change on a day by day basis. What we are interested in is the general overall weekly trends in bodyweight. Over the course of the week the trend should be to lose about 0.5 kg of bodyweight. If over a period of 2 weeks there is no reduction in bodyweight, the action is to reduce the total daily food intake by about 250 calories. Examine the bodyweight values each day for the next few weeks and then if no weight loss is achieved reduce the food intake by another 250 calories and continue this process until the desired 0.5 kg per week of weight loss is achieved.

Importantly, the minimum intake of food that is generally believed to be compatible with health for average sized people is about 1500 calories for men and 1200 calories for women. Hence it is not recommended to go below these minimum values. At this point, the only option available is to increase the level of exercise and maintain the food intake at the minimum levels. This is unlikely to be the case and if it happens you should consult with a medical doctor and a qualified nutritionist to see what could be the underlying cause.

The maximum recommended safe weight loss limit is about 1 kg per week. Hence if the trend in bodyweight loss is more than 1 kg per week it is recommended to increase the daily food intake by about 250 calories and examine how this affects the weight loss over the course of the next few weeks. If the weight loss continues to exceed 1 kg per week then continue to increase the food intake by about 250 calorie amounts until the safe weight loss limit is achieved. It may be tempting to continue to lose more than 1 kg per week. However, this usually means that you are losing muscle mass as well as fat and thus is not recommended. It is healthier and more sustainable over the long term, to limit the weight loss to between 0.5 kg to a maximum of 1 kg per week through sensible changes in the food consumed.

When making changes to the food intake please enter the revised total amount into the SuperTracker program and ensure that the revised food plan has sufficient micro- and macro-nutrients and that all the recommended nutrient levels are achieved.

Changes over the Long Term

The body is always in a continual state of change and hence the amount of food eaten and exercise performed will need to be adjusted over time, and it is recommended to continue to monitor your body weight each and every morning. As you continue to lose weight you will find that you require less food to maintain the smaller body size. However, as you continue to exercise each day you will get progressively fitter and be capable of training harder and will therefore naturally burn up more energy and require more food to sustain these increasingly intense training sessions. Hence the equilibrium you achieve between energy in through food consumed and energy out via exercise will be in a constant state of flux and needs to be continually re-assessed. Also as you lose weight and approach your target body weight you may decide to change the target and aim for greater overall weight loss or be happy with a higher body weight than originally intended.

THE MAINTENANCE FOOD INTAKE

Once you have reached your target bodyweight then you will need to modify your food intake. I recommend you maintain your exercise regime at about 1 hour of moderately intense exercise per day and increase your energy intake to match your energy expenditure. This will require the consumption of about 500 calories of more food than was eaten in the weight loss phase. Once the food intake has been adjusted to the maintenance level then continue to monitor your body weight each morning and make changes to the food intake based on any sustained weekly trends in bodyweight. If the bodyweight continues to fall over the next few weeks then increase the food intake by about 250 calories. If your bodyweight trends upwards over the next few weeks then reduce the food intake by about 250 calories. By making these simple adjustments a long term healthy weight will be easily achieved and it will have been due to the consumption of moderate quantities of healthy food in combination with daily exercise.

SIMPLE TIPS

There are a number of simple strategies that can be used to assist your weight loss progress:

1. Pay close attention to the quantity and type of food that is purchased at the shops. If you buy junk food and bring it back into the home then you will generally end up eating it at some stage. Hence the best advice is to show great discipline when shopping for food,

and make sure only healthy food is purchased. This often means encouraging all family members to eat healthy food.

2. Only eat foods that are in the program. Often in business meetings or social occasions people love to bring all sorts of energy rich junk foods. You need to avoid consuming such foods and strictly stick to your food plan. Adopt a strict policy of only eating food during designated meal times that are in your food plan.
3. Distribute your energy intake fairly evenly throughout the day. Hence if you are consuming 2000 calories each day try and have about 500 calories for each major meal (i.e. breakfast, lunch and dinner) and about 250 calories for morning and afternoon tea. This will prevent you from feeling hungry and help to stop your body from adopting a starvation mode which could be caused by extended periods without the consumption of food. Try and eat moderate meals and snacks regularly throughout the day.
4. Try and avoid situations where large amounts of junk foods will be present. A Friday evening with the work colleagues after a busy week in the office often involves large quantities of alcohol, and junk foods like chips, nuts and pizza. Better not to attend these functions and instead to organize a recreational activity on the weekend involving a game of golf, tennis, cycling or hiking and avoid the Friday night drinks.
5. Try to prepare and eat the vast majority of food from the home and avoid eating out. Generally restaurant food is full of fatty ingredients like rich oils and butter as they make the food taste better. The vast majority of food should be eaten from home or prepared from home and taken to work. Take control and responsibility for what you are putting into your body. When eating out choose modest serving sizes to account for the extra calories placed in the food.
6. Nothing tastes as good as a lean and healthy body feels. Some over-weight people will say that it is not worth all the sacrifice and effort to produce a lean and healthy body. But once you have a lean and healthy body you will know that it is worth the effort, and once the healthy lifestyle has been achieved it will not seem like much effort at all.
7. The key to long term success is the understanding that you are not on a new diet and exercise plan. You have adopted a new healthy lifestyle.