

Balancing the Equation

By Suze Hargraves

I eat a low-fat/high protein diet with carefully monitored caloric intake. It was recommended by an abdominal surgeon the morning after I collapsed in pain and was carted off to the hospital. After a battery of tests the diagnosis was, to put it bluntly, that I was too fat and ate one heck of a poor diet. If I kept it up, it would happen again. If I mended my evil ways it would not. I mended. Pain is a great motivator for me. Today I am about 75 pounds lighter and a lot more fit. Today I'd like to share some of the basic things I learned on my journey with you.

There are two basic components to weight loss; input and output. The equation is pretty simple. I'm not going to sugar coat it folks: If you put more in than you use you get fat. Yes, I used the word "fat". I know that's not politically correct, but when you've been up to a size 24 in your life, you get to *own* the word "fat". I've broken chairs, gotten dirty looks on airplanes and had to jiggle through turnstiles. I know how fat feels both inside and out. Balancing your input and output is the first and most important step to balancing your body and mind when it comes to fighting fat.

Let's get our numbers first:

1. Determining your ideal weight range. IVillage.com has one of the best online calculators at http://dftools.ivillage.com/healthtools/calc_iw.cfm. I recommend this one because it takes frame size into consideration. Don't aim for the low end of your range when setting your goal weight. Let's just get in the park before we try to swing for the homerun.
2. Now you need to find out how many calories you need to eat to get there. Click over to About.com (<http://nutrition.about.com/od/changeyourdiet/a/calguide.htm>) and find out what your requirements are. Most people are surprised by how much they can consume and still lose weight, but don't be fooled-you have to consume healthy foods in those calories or you're going to wind up with vitamin deficiencies and other major health issues.

Okay, we've got our numbers. Now we have to determine what to eat. The Mayo Clinic makes this easy by identifying a target number for each food group as follows:

Carbohydrates: 45-65% of total calorie intake. Emphasize complex carbohydrates, especially from whole grains, beans and nutrient-rich fruits. Limit added sugars from candy and other sweets, and stick with low-fat milk.

Protein: 10-35% of total calorie intake. Emphasize plant sources of protein, such as beans, lentils and soy, choose lean meats, and try to include seafood twice a week.

Fat: 20-35% of total calorie intake. Emphasize fats from healthier sources, such as nuts and olive, canola and nut oils.

Cholesterol: <300 milligrams per day. Reduce added cholesterol by emphasizing fruits and vegetables in your diet, limiting animal products, and eating no more than 6 ounces (170 grams) of meat a day.

Fiber: Woman-21-25 grams per day/Man 30-38 grams per day.

Sodium: 1,500 to 2,300 milligrams per day. (Consult your healthcare provider for recommendations if you have a health condition that warrants a diet limited in sodium.)

With this information under your belt you need to start reading food labels and keeping track of what you consume. Go to <http://www.fda.gov/Food/LabelingNutrition/ConsumerInformation/UCM078889.htm> to educate yourself on food labels.

Now that we've got a handle on what is supposed to go into our bodies, let's take a look at our output. This is where a lot of folks seem to drop off the band wagon. Back in "the old days" the thought of exercise had me cowering in fear behind the sofa with a box of Cheez-Its. It wasn't pretty. Now I know better. I found something I love doing. Actually I found two things; water and walking. Every day I go to the pool and do a half hour of exercise. When the weather's nice, I add a walk of at least 2 miles to that to up that output number. I also park further from stores and try to find other ways to add physical activity to my day. Explore your options and find an activity that rocks your socks. If you're doing something you like you are far more likely to do it daily. For an idea of how many calories specific activities burn go to <http://www.nutristrategy.com/activitylist4.htm> for an exhaustive list. A tip for using the list: If you divide the number beside each activity in the 130 lbs column by 130 you will get the

calories used per pound. You can take that number and multiply it by your own weight to see how many calories you're burning.

I still have about 30 or so pounds to go to be where I want to be, but I don't focus on that. My focus is on being healthy and providing my body with what it requires to respond the way I need it to respond. It's not about how I look, although admittedly that is part of it. It's really more about how I feel. I'm learning to trust my body again. I have learned that "I" am not somehow separate from my body. We are together in this life and it is my responsibility to provide a strong healthy body for the journey.

Start your journey to having a body you can love and trust today. It's worth the trip.