

My Game Plan

Like most Americans (and I literally do mean most - 66%) I used to be overweight – 70 pounds over my ideal weight at one point. Like most Americans I had tried every conceivable ‘diet’ to control my eating. Like 95% of Americans, I failed at this every single time ... until, that is, I discovered Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT). It was then, and only then, that I succeeded for the first (and last) time – and I have been at my goal weight for almost 20 years now.

The heart and soul of CBT is **not** what I am going to be focusing on in this document however. CBT actually happens *after* one has established a good game plan. They are 2 separate things – but one doesn’t work without the other.

We can have the best ‘game-plan’ in the world, and still fail miserably – if we don’t employ CBT. Conversely, CBT, by its very nature, is fairly useless (when it comes to weight loss) if one hasn’t established a good game plan. If I haven’t lost you yet, allow me to further explain: CBT is a process whereby we correct the mental programs that allow us to ‘talk ourselves right out of’ our best laid plans. We all have good intentions, but also seem to have great ways to talk ourselves out of our best intentions. So, yes, we need good intentions (a great game plan) but we also need CBT, a powerful strategy to re-program those thought processes that ‘kill’ our best intentions.

There are many ‘game-plans’ that can be employed to ‘lose weight’ but in order to be effective, they all have to do one thing – reduce caloric intake – period. I don’t care so much what method one uses to reduce caloric intake (Weight Watchers, Nutri-Systems, Atkins, South Beach, or My Fitness Pal) I just want to make the point that if calories are not reduced to the point where the body is forced to burn some of it’s own body fat for fuel, then weight loss simply doesn’t happen.

What I am going to share with you is **my** method for making this happen. This is how *I* do it – nothing more, nothing less. I am not telling you to do it this way. I am not saying it is the best way. I make no claims

about the safety or efficacy of the method. It is simply the way I do it. So here is my disclaimer – ***I am not telling you to do it this way.***

When I began, 20 years ago, my method involved a spiral-bound notebook, a paper-back book of calorie values that I carried around with me, a set of measuring cups/spoons and an old kitchen scale. I still have that old calorie book in a box somewhere in my attic, but I haven't looked at it for years. I don't need to, I can find the caloric content of just about any food on the planet within seconds on the internet. But one thing I do remember distinctly in that book was a simple formula that gave the estimated caloric need for humans. The formula was $(A) \times (B) - (500 \text{ or } 1000) = (C)$, where A was current body weight, B was a variable (12-17, 12 being sedentary, 17 being very active) and C was the suggested caloric intake to lose 1 or 2 lb per week (-500 for 1lb, -1000 for 2lb). It was a very simple calculation and became the starting point of my journey.

I cannot even tell you what the calculation yielded for me 20 years ago (that is up in the attic too), but I can tell you that it got me into the 'ball park'. Accuracy really didn't matter much, because I quickly reasoned that if the number I had come up with didn't make me lose weight I would simply reduce that number by 100 calories each week until I found the number that did. And this is exactly what I proceeded to do. I wrote down and calculated every single morsel of food I put in my mouth, every day, and simply stopped when I hit my calorie limit.**

(**Just in case you have stumbled across this article before watching the videos, let me re-iterate that this method won't work without CBT. Without CBT I would ***not likely*** have 'simply stopped' when I hit my calorie limit, I would have used one of my many 'intention-killing thoughts', like '*I can start tomorrow*' to blow right past my limit.)

I decided from the beginning that I was done trying to eat reduced-fat, non-fat, weird calorie reducing foods, etc. I was going to eat only foods that I absolutely enjoyed – but simply limit my calories. So there was no change in my 'food choices' just changes in 'portion sizes'.

I came up with this acronym for myself WARE > Weigh Add Record Eat >

which meant I had to *know* the amount in calories, have it *written* in my notebook and *calculated* BEFORE it went in my mouth. Here is where I first noticed something interesting. When I wasn't paying attention at all, it didn't matter, I could eat anything 'without thinking about it', but when I followed this acronym I found myself becoming a bit anal about it. For example, if I was even 5 calories over, I would correct that before I ate it. I felt 'compelled' to take 3 pieces of corn off my plate, so it was 2000c not 2001c. It was weird, but also felt pretty powerful. I knew I was on to something.

I also reasoned that even if I was 'off' on some my calorie counts for certain foods (for example ground beef, or a piece of pizza), as long as I kept my choices relatively constant and consistent, that would eventually even itself out over the course of time and be absorbed by the 'law of averages'.

My plan worked like a charm. I weighed myself every day at the same time, and took the *average* of the 7 weights as my gauge. I also averaged my 'daily calorie counts' the same way. If my 7-day average of body weights didn't go down 1 lb, then I reduced my 'target calorie limit' by 100c until it did. It was a very simple, systematic way to find my threshold and consistently keep my body moving in the right direction.

I found something else interesting. Most of the foods that I ate consisted of less than 100 different items. (Milk, cheese, bread, eggs, fish, chicken, etc.) As long as I bought the same products each trip to the grocery, I didn't have to re-calculate. As long as I measured out the same amount each time, I didn't have to reference my book. (Nowadays this task is infinitely easier. With computer programs like MyFitnessPal you can log on and have all of this calculated for you – for free.) Even back then, with a book, note-pad, pen and calculator, it wasn't long before I had things down to a 'science'. What was a bit of a pain in the beginning, soon became a 'snap' to do. I would actually time myself occasionally, just to see how quick I was getting at it. If it took me more than 10 minutes extra per day to track my calories – that was a slow day. Most days it was 5 minutes – 5 FLIPPING MINUTES – not a very big price to pay for the accuracy of knowing I was in control.

Then there were those foods like ‘home-made’ lasagna (my wife makes killer lasagna). How was I to know how many calories were in a serving of that? Well, when I thought about it, it really wasn’t that hard to figure out. All of the individual ingredients could be weighed and the entire dish could be weighed after it was cooked. By dividing the entire calories in the whole pan of lasagna by the weight (in grams) of the whole pan I had a ratio expressed in C/g. Simply multiplying that ratio by the weight (in grams) of *my individual* portion yielded calories. Pretty simple math! And once I had calculated the ‘recipe’, no need to do that again – just keep the ratio.

Unless one is tracking calories, I really see no reason to continue trying to lose weight. There is nothing quite as frustrating and self-defeating as trying hard to follow a nutrition plan only to ***not*** lose because one has ***not*** created a sufficient deficit. I have seen far too many people in my practice who believe that *just* eating healthy is the key. So they work hard to eat healthy and fail to drop weight because they are still taking in too many calories. Healthy food often has just as many calories, sometimes even more, as junk food has.

There is simply no reason to ***not*** track calories! There are literally dozens perhaps hundreds, of apps designed to help you do this. My Fitness Pal, for instance, helps you to track your calories, your weight, your exercise, and has a giant database of foods at your fingertips to figure out how much you are consuming. All you need is a kitchen scale that you can purchase at Walmart for under 25 bucks. I have had a scale on my countertop for 15 years. And I still use it quite regularly to weigh things like salad dressing, mayonnaise, etc.

I personally eat 2 meals per day, and they are both within an 8 hour time-frame, so essentially I am fasting for 16 hours every day. My first ‘meal’ of the day is around 12p and the other at 8p. So, do I eat ‘breakfast’? - yes, most certainly I do – I ‘*break*’ my ‘*fast*’ at 12p. If you are one that believes you should eat ‘break fast’, in the morning, because it is the most important meal of the day, get over it already. There is nothing about any *time* that a food is consumed that makes it any better or worse – really?? I don’t eat until 12p for one simple reason – I don’t feel like it! I work out

every morning – good and hard – and I am certainly not going to eat before my workout. When I am done working out I have zero appetite - that usually doesn't kick in until around 11a, so by 12p I am ready to eat. I eat a relatively small meal at 12p and a relatively large meal at 8p. If I am eating say 2100 calories, 700c (1/3) will be my 12p, and 1400c (2/3) will be my 8p meal. My 12p meal will be super high in protein and fat (zero carbs). My 8p will contain my carbs (20-30%). I do this for a reason – I like to be alert during the day and sleepy at night. Carbs make me very sleepy, so I avoid them during the day and eat them only in the evening meal. Managing 2 meals a day is 33% less hassle than managing 3, pretty simple. If this is not healthy, then I must be an anomaly. I have been doing it for 20 years and at age 53 I am healthier than almost everyone I know. The truth, however, is that I am not an anomaly. There is no biological reason for eating 3 times instead of 2, (or 2 instead of 1 for that matter). I can't speak for a diabetic (or anyone who might have special health issues), of course, but I am not a diabetic – enough said.

Here is another thing I do to give myself a major psychological advantage. I cut calories on 5 days of the week and ***intentionally go over*** on 2 days. My *break-even* calorie input as of this moment (to maintain my 200 lb frame) is 3000 calories per day. I eat 2600C, 5 day per week (Mon-Thu) which gives me 2 days to play on the weekend. An extra thousand on Friday and Saturday gives me plenty to play with. Doing the math: $(2600*5) + (4000*2) = 21,000$, the exact number of calories I need in one week to stay at 200lb.

The way I map out my weeks gives me a huge psychological advantage. I love having a few beers, a couple pieces of pizza, some chips, popcorn, or whatever on the weekends and I'm never going to stop doing that. I look forward to doing that on the weekends, which makes what I'm doing throughout the week seem so much more worth it. (Contrast that with someone who thinks I can't do that anymore I can't ever have a piece of pizza or a few beers). The beauty is that we don't have to exclude anything fun from our diet. I can arrange my calories in such a way that I can basically rob Peter to pay Paul. Why not shave a few calories throughout the week, when I'm concentrating on work - not sitting around thinking about it, and have some extra to spend on the weekend when I'm watching football, or hanging out with friends? To me that makes what I'm doing

throughout the week seems so worth it. You have to treat calories like a bank account. If you haven't tried this, I highly recommend it.

Now a lot of times people bristle at all of this, thinking why should I have to do all this? Skinny people don't have to do that. That's where I call bullshit. Yes they do. Everyone does it in his/her own way. That's why it appears that skinny people can eat so much, it's because you probably see them when they are having their '**over-age**' days. That's stands to reason doesn't it? We see our friends at parties at celebrations, and it seems like the skinny people are eating even more than the fat people. And that's probably absolutely true, but it's not because the skinny people have super high metabolism's. It's the fact that they don't eat that way all the time. In fact that's probably the only time that week that they've eaten that way, and the rest of the week they have probably shaved calories in preparation for that event.

It's really quite simple. If you treat calories like a budget, you only have so much to spend and you can decide *when* to spend it and *what* to spend it on. I could spend my entire 21,000 calorie weekly budget on McDonald's and my weight would not change. How do I know that? Because I have done it - just to prove a point. Of course I don't want to eat that way, because I value my health more than I've value eating those kinds of foods.

I also completely discount the idea that you shouldn't eat right before you go to bed. Again, I have been doing that for 15 years, with the result of being the healthiest I've ever been. I'm usually done eating my second and final meal of the day at around 930 PM, and I am usually in bed by 1030-1045, trying to be asleep by 11. Again, there is no physiological reason to *not* do this. The 'wives tale' is that what you eat right before you go to bed it just turns to body fat. The fact is: If my calorie consumption in a 24-hour period is such that it balances my calorie expenditure for that same 24 hour, there's nothing to turn to fat - no matter when I eat it.

I have done some research on the recommended ratios of carbs/ proteins/ fats. From the data I have found it appears that the recommended intake for carbs is anywhere from 40-55%, fats 20-30% and protein 20-35% by weight. (Fat is higher in calories per gram (9/4), so keep in mind that this

changes the ratio if we are thinking in terms of calories from fat rather than weight.)

	1	2	3	4	5	Avg
Carbs	50	55	40	40	55	48
Fats	30	20	25	30	20	25
Protein	20	25	35	30	25	27
	100	100	100	100	100	100

The meta-analysis of 5 separate studies (above) averages out to be carbs 40% fats 25% and protein 27%. I am not a huge stickler on this, but I try to keep these balanced in my diet at about 1/3 each, or 33.3% from each category. I don't personally track this routinely, but when I have taken the time to track the ratios in the foods I actually eat, it has been pretty close to 1/3 of my calories coming from each category on average, which means that I am a little bit higher than the meta-analysis in proteins and fats, and a bit lower in carbs. That is probably because I try to eat gluten and lactose free most of the time and I try to beef up my protein and fat intake. I don't drink pop and such. This is because I work out a lot (needing more protein) and because carbs just seem to make me feel lethargic. I don't like to eat too much of them (but don't get me wrong, I love to taste them).

So there you have it. This is pretty much my 'game plan' - the way I plan my food intake for the week. Whether or not I follow this game plan depends on how well I practice my CBT for the week.