

The PrayFit Diet: A Calorie Isn't Just a Calorie

Healthy eating is not about a set of rules or a magic list of ingredients. It's not a matter of timing, food combinations or calories counted.

The reason I know this is because this generation is the most educated, the most aware and the most capable of living a healthy lifestyle than any that has ever walked the earth, and yet we're the least successful at it. In fact, the next time you're at your local bookstore, mosey on over to the health section. You can't miss it. Ironically, the largest section in the store is reserved for the overflow of books written to help the world get thin again.

Without pulling a book off the shelves just yet, saunter through the thousands of titles. Explore the countless fads and innumerable strategies intended to help you and your family shrink: how-to promises from A to Z. One thing is for sure: none of them will work until you and I answer the bigger question of *why*.

See, *why* is both the question and the answer to the world's biggest epidemic. And it's a question that you won't find asked or answered among any of those books, until now.

What Is Balance?

Some programs will try to sell you on the idea that all calories are created equal, but that is simply not true. They often argue that weight loss and health are simply a matter of "calories in, calories out," meaning that if you burn more calories than you consume, you will be rewarded with looser-fitting clothes and a gold star from your physician.

While it's true that a calorie is a calorie, more and more

studies and many scientists have come to the consensus that it is shortsighted to ignore the effects of different calorie types on the individual. You could, for example, decide to take in your entire day's share of calories via candy bars. But you'll pay a hefty price in terms of vitality, not to mention your teeth, compared to those who opted for a balance of lean meats, whole grains, vegetables and healthy fats.

That's why the PrayFit Diet calorie pie chart consists of three equal slices—33-33-33—each representing a balanced and proportional dose of the three macronutrients that are absolutely crucial for good health: carbohydrates, protein and fat. The focus is on whole foods and clean eating. I'm here to tell you that if any diet warns that an entire group of whole foods is unhealthy or off-limits (say, no fruit or no fat), you should be wary.

While the total amount of calories you consume on PrayFit is important, the degree to which you are able to look, feel and actually be healthy is largely determined by the choices you make within each category and how these ratios are balanced within your total caloric intake. This type of balance is more sustainable—which means more weight lost over time—because it doesn't require drastic cuts in any one type of food. Eating in balance means that you get the benefit of a wide variety of nutritional sources without having to eliminate any.

Eating a variety of macronutrients ensures that you are taking in a well-balanced diet that provides adequate amounts of quality protein for repair and regeneration of tissues (especially muscle tissue), healthy sources of carbohydrates for steady energy, and healthy fats for proper brain function, cardiovascular health, and joint function. Taken together, this leads to marked improvements in body composition and key health markers such as cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar.

Combined with regular exercise, this type of approach to

nutrition can also lend itself to greater strength gains and muscular endurance. Need further convincing? This diet can limit inflammation and reduce the risk of certain cancers by acting favorably on key genes. And you can do all of this without the mathematical deftness of a Harvard scholar.

The research further bears out the virtue of balance. And the man behind the charts, studies and focus groups is one of the nation's foremost experts on nutrition as it pertains to body composition. My good friend Jim Stoppani, PhD, a PrayFit contributing expert whose dedicated examination of the existing research on the concept of equal macronutrients forms the backbone of this diet, believes that the science simply hammers home what common sense and biblical mandates have already spelled out.

Research shows that when protein and carbs are eaten in equal amounts, brain function is optimized, allowing you to be more efficient at work and on all cognitive tasks. This is due to the fact that such a diet better maintains steady blood glucose and insulin levels throughout the day. This will make you much less of a candidate for disorders such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other weight-related maladies that cost Americans in excess of \$190 billion in medical costs annually.

Studies also show that when these three macronutrients are eaten in equal quantities and in proper amounts, in conjunction with a proper exercise program, fat loss is enhanced, while important muscle tissue is spared or improved. That's because all three macronutrients play separate but crucial roles in the maintenance of muscle.

If you are too low on carbohydrates—your body's preferred and primary fuel source—you will lack the energy to engage in, or recover from, activities that you enjoy. With low-carb diets you also tend to miss out on getting ample phytonutrients and vitamins from fruit and whole grains.

Going with a prolonged low-fat approach robs your joints of crucial support and can lead to greater inflammation and fat retention.

If you opt to cut out too much protein, your muscles will lack the building blocks they require for improved shape, size or performance, meaning that a loss of lean muscle—and consequently an increase in fat—is almost inevitable.

Because this diet also reduces inflammation in the body, it further promotes fat loss. This is due to the fact that when inflammation is high in the body—whether as a result of stress, poor nutrition or exercise—certain chemicals known as cytokines are released that can influence fat gain.

Compounding that bit of good news is that this type of eating is infinitely more sustainable than most prepackaged diets that are floating around on the market. What does that mean for you? Steady weight loss over a much longer time frame and the ability to keep it off without resorting to dietary dramatics. This is, without question, a much healthier and more productive way to meet the biblical expectations of stewardship of our bodies.

*This is the second in a three-part series of articles adapted from The PrayFit Diet: The Revolutionary, Faith-Based Plan to Balance Your Plate and Shed Weight by **Jimmy Peña**. Copyright © 2014 by PrayFit, LLC. Reprinted by permission of Touchstone, a Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.*

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