



FAT, the "F" word

Say it, then do something about it!

Anyone trying to stay fit and reasonably trim knows how hard it is; and every time it becomes an issue, that "F" word comes to mind - Fat! Our grand daughter actually came out and said it the other day, a small miracle in itself because many don't like using it. Instead they go with euphemisms such as healthy-looking, well-padded and radiant, especially when talking face to face with someone who could do with losing a few pounds. Some are even reluctant to say it about themselves. Unfortunately, avoiding the truth doesn't help, and it certainly won't fix a growing problem. Carrying excess fat contributes to a host of medical conditions that not only make life harder, but can also shorten it considerably. When my pants start to feel tight, I force myself to look in the mirror at what's overflowing the waistband. Then, not being averse to the odd expletive, I swallow my pride and say the "F" word to myself: "You're getting FAT - do something about it!"

For most of us, it's all down to lifestyle - insufficient appropriate exercise and what we eat and drink. The first part is arguably the easiest to deal with by finding the time and inclination to get off our butts and burn those extra calories. Reducing the intake of them is something we covered in a previous article, The No-diet Diet - Healthy Living HL07; but figuring out which types of food need cutting down can be clouded both by our own assumptions and what we are led to believe. Apart from solid food, many of us enjoy the odd glass of wine, not realising that alcohol is sugar. It's the same with spirits, only worse; and a cool beer or two on a hot day adds more cereals to those in the accompanying sandwich and snacks. The way to go is back to the old days of counting calories, or kilojoules (kj) which are used more commonly these days.

Processed foods, which probably make up a good portion of the daily intake, ought to be the simplest of choices for the weight-watcher because it's only a matter of checking the nutritional information on the labels. These state the ingredients, including all those numbered additives, plus a list of dietary values that should help to differentiate between the healthy and the not-so. The trouble comes when there is too much information. On the box of one popular breakfast cereal are three separate info panels, four if the actual ingredients are considered. Prominently displayed on the front is a comparison between the suggested % daily intake and the % of fat, sugar, carbs, salt, etc. The intake is apparently that recommended for an average adult requiring 8700kj per day which, it is suggested, may have to be adjusted depending on energy needs. These figures are based on a 40g (or 1 metric cup) serve of dry cereal. It starts getting complicated when the side of the box is checked out. There are those same inclusions, but set out in four columns: quantity per serving; % daily intake per serving; per serve with 1/2 cup skim milk; and last but not least, quantity per 100g. Actually, it isn't last because there's another panel just above... Dear, oh dear! See what I mean about too much information?

I don't usually bother with it, except to check out those elements that are the most likely to produce body fat - carbs, sugar and fats. If there's an excessive amount of any one, I think twice before buying it. As for what I do eat, measuring and weighing exact quantities of ingredients just reminds me that I am probably going to be hungry after what seems like a snack as opposed to a proper meal. For the purpose of this article, however, I decided to consult the packet and tried the suggestions. Using a measured cup of cereal plus the 1/2 cup of skim milk was hopeless - too much of the solid stuff, for me anyway, and the quantity of milk absolutely drowned what remained after I'd put about half of the flakes back in the box! To confirm how much of the various fat-producing ingredients I'd eaten, I began wading through the columns, became mega-confused and eventually gave up. All I managed to confirm was that some of the numbers didn't add up to the totals they were apparently based on. This led me to the conclusion that these figures were unreliable and, at best, can only be used as a rough guide.

So, I went back to the "F" word - what makes it and how do I get rid of it from around my waist? Eating plenty of fruit is a healthy option; but despite having picked it for a living, I'm not over-keen, apart from tomatoes and capsicum. Anyway, I heard somewhere that it contains sugar, and too much can be as bad as not enough. Fresh vegetables are nutritious and filling, and I love them; however, some like potatoes, sweet corn and peas all have starch in them. Still, it was a good start - meals with plenty of vegies, reducing the amount of those high in carbs. Now, I'm no vegetarian and need my meat. Most types are okay, although some are high in saturated fat. We always pick the leaner cuts and trim off as much fat as possible before cooking; and we buy chicken breast fillets (when they're on special, of course), those without the skin which is a weight-watcher's no-no. Then, I got to thinking that I wasn't really changing much because we've generally been sticking to the rules of the no-diet diet for ages. That being the case, what was responsible for stacking on the extra fat?

Not really wanting to, I finally had to admit that the culprit was probably buttered crumpets for breakfast! Them, plus the occasional nightly dessert of a buttered cinnamon bun; and the crackers which were tastier spread with butter; and other stuff that was overloaded with fat, sugar and carbs; and, and, and...! How stupid was I? I asked myself: do you truly need any of these? No, was the reluctant answer, but they are really nice and I'm going to find it hard without them. Okay, what about the blubber overflowing your pants, then - do you want it hanging there forever, growing by the day? No you don't, so say the word - Fat, and say it again and again until it gets into your thick skull that you want it gone and can't afford to keep feeding it!

It was a hard lesson, a brutal one for a man who loves his food, but the message hit home. I've climbed back on the wagon. The butter stays in the fridge, and with luck the pile of crumpets we bought on special will languish in the freezer until I pluck up the courage to throw them to next-door's chickens. After only a few days it seems to be working. I've slipped a couple of times when the withdrawal symptoms began to nag, but the home-made soup and a small sandwich did the trick. Although the fat's still there, I'm positive it will start disappearing soon enough, seeing as my weight's dropped by two kilos in a fortnight.

So, if it applies to you, say the "F" word to yourself as often as needed; and if you take notice, pretty soon the reason for saying it in the first place will have disappeared. Then you may agree that the "F" word wasn't such a dirty one after all.

FOOTNOTE: Our New Year's resolution – to relax the pressure and reduce stress. So, in future we will continue publishing Healthy Living articles at the beginning of each second month, but won't be advertising the subject beforehand. Hope you don't mind.

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