

## **It's About Balance AND the Calories**

Back in 2012, after diagnosing me with high blood pressure and prescribing meds for the same, my doctor suggested a fasting-type weight loss program run by the local hospital. Eight shakes a day, then reintroducing a meal at a time over several weeks until the participants were eating three meals a day again. I scoffed at the idea. Me? Pffftt. I knew how much a person was supposed to exercise, and I did. I ate a lot of salads and not the kind based on a bowl full of iceberg lettuce. For the most part I didn't eat processed foods. And after spending 26 years in broadcast news I was all too familiar with the statistics on the "yo-yo effect" of extreme dieting...losing weight then gaining back what you lost and then some. I believed the program would get results but I didn't think the results would be sustainable. I also know myself well enough to know that I probably couldn't handle fasting for days on end either emotionally or psychologically.

In August 2013, when I told my doc I was going to be a dispatcher he said, "Every dispatcher I've met is either overweight or obese." Then I heard the term, "Dispatcher's Disease." Welcome to your new career. Yikes.

Now... it's confession time. I am as seduced by instant gratification as anyone else! Not a lot was happening with my weight despite the addition of periods of basic step aerobics on my shifts as I was able. (We're solitary dispatchers at my agency, important if you're going to rock out to Salt 'n' Pepa to do step. Yeah, Push it Good.) So I caved. I signed up for a modified fasting program run by the local hospital. Five shakes a day and a 400 calorie dinner. And that's it. No Starbucks chai, no chocolate, no beer, no wine, no nothin'! That went for four weeks and then we started adding back the other two meals of the day.

Four things. It was easier than I thought it would be. It got results. I learned something important. And I'm still whittling away at my weight.

The most important item in that list is what I learned. It's not just about the calories...although it's a LOT about the calories, make no mistake about that...it's about balance *within* meals, too. The right proportions of protein, starch, and vegetables. I certainly didn't learn that growing up, I'm a member of the "clean plate club," with food piled on my plate, no proportions in sight. And I didn't think to learn it when I changed how and what I was eating as an adult.

Here's the deal: each meal has 4-6 ounces of protein, a serving of starch...which is less than I thought it would be... and a half a plate of vegetables. To the tune of 1200 calories a day. Bingo! Nearly fifteen pounds off in the ten week program and another nearly two pounds in the past two weeks. No, I'm not hungry all the time although for the first time in years I actually get real feelings of hunger instead of never feeling hungry and eating anyway. Yes, I miss eating chocolate whenever I want it. And some days I fall off the wagon and eat whatever the heck I want. With no guilt because I'm a grownup. I own it when I do that, just as I own the results I get when I stick with my new eating behavior.

Yes, new eating behavior. I've started thinking about the extras, Starbucks chai, chocolate, Dairy Queen Blizzards, in the way financial experts say you should think about buying something with credit. You

know, what's your plan to pay it off? (By the way, did you know a DQ large size Blizzard is 1300 calories? Plunk a couple of those in your week and you've got a hefty bill to pay!) I've started thinking, "What do I have to do to burn those calories *today*?" Because while it *is* about calories in, it's also about calories out. Will I have time to run an extra mile with the dog? Will I have a crew in-house long enough to relieve me for my lunch half hour so I can use that time to walk laps around the complex? My options are "yes, I can do that," "no and I'm not going to eat this," or "Heck with it, I'm going to eat this anyway." The more I choose the second option the better I get at resisting the "want" rather than reacting to the impulse.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not a fan of fad dieting. I'm a fan of eating. Enough so that I occasionally repeat this mantra to myself while sitting at a meal with the firefighters: "This is how I eat now. This is how I eat now. This is..." You get the idea!

By the same token, it's not solely about calorie management. A sedentary lifestyle leads directly to what we call "Dispatcher's Disease" and what a leading obesity researcher at Arizona State University and the Mayo Clinic started calling "Sitting Disease" *back in 1999*. He says *your chair will kill you*.

**In the next column: *Fighting the Killer Chair*.**