

# Men Eat Healthy Too

I've just passed the half way point in my fat-shedding journey, from a morbid 285 pounds to an Adonis-like 200. Okay, maybe Adonis wasn't fifty-three years old with a bald spot and a mortgage, but the point is I'm aiming for my high school weight and sure as God created type II diabetes, I will never be 285 pounds again.

How am I doing it? Much to the consternation of the billion-dollar weight-loss industry, I'm just following the six word message that remarkably has not yet registered with 65 per cent of North Americans: Eat Better, Eat Less, Exercise More. No goofy diet, no intestinal cleansing (phew!), no As-Seen-On-TV wonky exercise machinery.

The more telling thing is how I didn't do it—how I brushed off healthy eating and exercise for twenty years, becoming clinically obese (actually, among we larger men the preferred term is Bacon Enhanced). My excuse, I would tell people, was that I suffered from an overactive fork.

Healthy eating was for others. I could never understand the guy at the breakfast buffet happily ordering just a poached egg with dry toast. To me he seemed to be from the planet Odd. I, meanwhile, would urgently stockpile mounds of scrambled eggs and French toast under the premise that "If I don't eat it, it will just go to waste." Years as a corporate VP and I'm rationalising like a ten year old. The smell of bacon in the morning will do that to you.

The ironic thing is that I'm married to a Public Health Nurse whose career mission is to promote healthier lifestyles. You could wallpaper our house with the Healthy Lifestyle literature she's brought home. Low-fat cookbooks overflow our shelves. I have a drawer full of Healthy Heart T-shirts (size XXL, more irony there). I can recite the Seven Benefits

of Broccoli. Still, I ate like I owned Frito-Lay stock. Clearly it's not lack of information that kept me from proper eating.

Personally, I blame the low-fat yogurt ads. You've seen them—women doing high kicks in swirly skirts while sipping yogurt from ever-so-pretty containers. Lots of "You Go Girl" patter about dropping dress sizes, and dancing, always dancing. These cute 'n colourful health-conscious messages are obviously not aimed at your average guy.

By contrast, that's followed by a fast food ad in which two men feed burgers into their mouths like steel billets through a rolling mill, discussing the merits of seared cattle flesh at an intellectual level best described as "reptilian." Eat Like a Man! is the message here, and saturated fats are the medium.

*Continued on page 2*



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From what I'm seeing, food advertising flows in distinct streams according to sex. For women it's "Hey Girlfriend, you better lose weight so buy this." For guys it's "Be a Man—eat this fattening glop, with extra cheese." Apparently the food companies have analysed their focus group data and accurately concluded that women will spend billions in their drive to appear prettier; men will spend billions in their drive to revert farther back on the evolutionary scale.

So health promotion professionals please note: overweight men do not respond the same as women. Women respond to nurturing encouragement, sisterhood support, and empowerment hype. Men respond to blows on the head with blunt objects. For proof, think Three Stooges. You know that bit where Moe whacks Larry on the noggin with the sledgehammer, then Larry yanks Curly around by pliers up the nose? Hilarious! We men love that stuff!

Sure, you can try to instruct guys with Healthy Lifestyle Tips written in delicate feminine script: Use a smaller plate; Eat colourful veggies; Artichokes are your friend... men don't hear a word of it. It's processed by that same part of the male brain that filters and discards incoming phrases like "Have you seen my purse" and "Pick up the kids from dance on your way home." Men, as women eventually learn, cringe from any list that begins with Things You Need to Do to Improve Yourself. No, for the male sex, dumb eating habits have to be knocked from the head by force, Three Stooges style.

For me, the smack with the sledgehammer came after some one-on-one counsel, during which my prospect for diabetes and premature, unpleasant death was made gruesomely clear. A long honest stare at my semi-clad self in a full length mirror was the pliers up the nose, only more painful. A hundred cheery posters of helpful eating tips couldn't match that. Giving weight loss tips to the obese is like giving swimming tips to the drowning.

Against the daily barrage of advertising that implores me to Eat Like a Man by way of triple burgers and all things deep fried, I have gradually come round to the realization that REAL Real Men eat healthy for themselves and their families' sake. After fifty years' stubborn abstention I finally braved low-fat yogurt. It's actually not bad, and to my pleasant surprise I have not developed any tendencies to dance around in swirly skirts. Colonel Saunders and Ronald McDonald—you were good pals over the years but frankly your food is crap. Farewell.

I'm not yet, but almost, Mr. Poached Egg with Dry Toast. I can practically feel the wiring changing in my brain as new eating habits displace old ones, even as new trim clothes replace my comically oversized old duds now destined for the Goodwill Enormous Gentleman rack. And when friends ask what the hardest part has been in my weight-losing effort, my answer comes easy: The toughest pounds to lose were the rocks in my head.



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