



The Weighting Game

Article by Sonni Dyer

One of the toughest disciplines in all of our training is know when to say "when" in the area of eating & nutrition.

It amazes me how I have no problem finding the motivation to complete a 4hour brick workout (in sub-40 degree weather & at the right hear-rate intensity).....yet can't find that same motivation when eyeing the girl-scout cookies @ 10pm that same evening.

What gives? Is this some type of cruel joke that life bestows upon the endurance athletes in the world?

Every December, January, and Feb I receive scores of e-mails from athletes who know that they've "put on a few" over the holidays and need to shed the weight. Actually, let me re-phrase this.....because it's not '*weight*' that will slow them in a race come spring. **It's FAT.**

Watch an Ironman, marathon, or stage of the Tour de France on any given year and look at the leaders, elites, and pro's in the field. If you notice anything, you notice that every athlete is extremely lean as though a swim-cap has replaced their skin. This is no accident.

As a coach.....sometimes the task is fairly easy with an athlete. I know that if I can help them reduce their %-of-body-fat, that I can **INCREASE their power-to-weight ratio**.....they'll go faster without gaining any *new* fitness or strength. While this isn't always the case in the water w/ swimming.....it is often true on the bike.....and ALWAYS true when running (where YOU will support & carry your weight 100% of the time).

Ahhh, the dilemma.....How does one best drop the % of FAT in their body, while simultaneously training for a sport (or sports) that demands a constant flow of energy (calories)?? THIS is the million \$ question.

And, actually, the answer is really kind-of simple.

But first a disclaimer: NO secret diet, NO %-formula, no-carb-this, no-sugar-that is ultimately responsible for losing a % of body fat. As John Parker said in his book (*Once A Runner*), "**The secret is..... that there is NO secret.**"

It really is as simple as 2nd grade math. To lose body-fat, you must burn more calories than you ingest.

So the 1st step in losing the fat is **KNOWING** what you're currently taking in. To do this, you can simply keep a food-log for one week that counts all the calories you ate.....then divide by 7 to get the daily average for the week. Ez.

Next, you need to know where you are **GOING**. What is the goal? Well, if I have a male athlete who's at 17% body-fat (You can get measured @ most health-clubs these days.) and we set a goal of 12% body-fat to optimize his race performance.....it's pretty clear that we need to LOSE 5% body-fat.

Now, I hear you asking, 5% of what? Well, if the athlete weighs in at 175lbs at the 17% body-fat mark.....5% of that is 8.75 pounds.

THAT's how much FAT we intend to lose.....almost 9 pounds.

At this point we simply apply the math. Let's assume that we found that the athlete averaged 2600 calories per day (through his week's food log) and that **THIS intake** is what maintained his 17% body-fat state. Now, we get a glimpse of this individual's BMR (basal metabolic rate).

Knowing that **each pound equates to 3500 calories**.....we need to create a very *slight* deficit.

He can create that deficit in one of 2 ways.....eat less calories, OR burn (metabolize) more calories.

Personally, I'd swim the English Channel for a Wendy's Frosty. But I do realize that different people have different time-durations to train each day. So the key to the above objective is the word "**slight**".



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Know that if we cut back on the calories (relative to the NEED for them) too much, other mechanisms in the body will immediately sense the void and shift hormonal & metabolic levels such that you'll begin to strip away muscle tissue (as 'fuel') and SLOW the metabolism down. **So we want to create the deficit VERY GRADUALLY.....at about 200 calories per day.**

So instead of our athlete (175lb. Male) taking in 2600 calories each day.....we'll have him ingest 2400 calories and not alter training. OR, he can burn the extra 200 calories and ingest the SAME amount. His choice.

Creating the 200 calorie deficit each day.....means we created a 1400 calorie deficit for the week. **In 2.5 weeks, he'd of lost one pound of fat.** Now if that seems too slow a 'pace' for all of us "7-pounds-in 2 days!!", need it now, Americans out there.....realize that each pound of fat also holds a good deal of water. So on the scales, it may look like you've lost 2 to 3 times as much.....2 to 3 pounds.

At any rate, keeping up this practice (while still rewarding yourself) at this pace for several weeks (& even months) **WILL** get you to the target-point that you set out for. **Attempting to lose weight much faster is dangerous to your training since you'll need 'energy' and 'muscle tissue' in order to fuel your efforts & extend race-fitness.**

Now up to this point, our discussion has centered around the TOTAL intake and expenditure of calories.....and not the %'s of carbs to proteins to fats. I make this distinction because (in my view) this has less to do with losing body-fat and determines mostly 'how well' an athlete functions (races & trains) WITHIN a certain caloric intake.

As a general rule of thumb, I think that **the percentages FOR ENDURANCE ATHLETES should be 60% carbohydrates, 20% protein, and 20% fat.** But everyone should also recognize that, as individuals, the ideal percentages may be unique and vary from one athlete to another.

What I **am** certain of is that many 'weight-loss' diets (such as: Atkins, Sugar-busters, 40-30-30, and the no-carb varieties) **DO work**.....but only because they, in the end, **limit the total number of calories** someone takes in. Not because of their %'s. And many an athlete has been left to cut their training short on occasion because of a lack of energy (carb-calories) offered by these plans.

To conclude: You **can** increase your economy, endurance, and speed by losing more of a percentage of your body-fat and increasing your 'strength-to-weight' ratio. But it must be done slowly and deliberately and occur over the course of several weeks and months. And the results on your performance **can** be dramatic,especially when climbing hills on the bike and running.

But it does take some simple math, some degree of discipline, and omitting the walk down the 'Hagan-Das' aisle at the grocery store.

Coach Sonni Dyer

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