

## Ross' Precision Health & Fitness Newsletter

### Issue #2 – 11/1/2006

Halloween has come and gone and we have entered the time year when people tend to eat more, exercise less, and generally make less progress towards their goals. The holiday season is a time of gatherings with family and friends, travel, schedule irregularities, and of course lots of food. While it is realistic to expect some inconsistency in your exercise and nutrition, you should not stop trying or give up altogether. So to help you stay on track, from now until the end of the year, I will be giving you tips to help survive the holidays in your best shape ever.

While you may have eaten too much candy on Halloween, just consider it a small bump in your road to success. The important thing is not to let one bad day turn into a bad week or month. The healthy approach is to realize that you have not totally blown your diet and one slip up is not a reason to abandon your healthy eating habits. Instead, try not to dwell on eating poorly and use it as motivation to rededicate yourself to your program. I do not want you to feel as though you cannot enjoy yourself at holiday celebrations, but instead look at your upcoming week and see where the potential problems will be. For example, if you have a family brunch or dinner on Sunday, acknowledge that Sunday will probably be a bad eating day, so you should motivate yourself to be as good as possible leading up to that day. The worst thing to do, although it is quite common, is to think that since one day will be bad, it will not matter if other days are bad as well. If you take this approach you will have to work much harder after the holidays are over.

Think of your path to success as a bike ride up a hill where you start at the bottom and your goal is to reach the top. When you are following your program you are pedaling and getting closer towards your goal. When you have slip-ups in your exercise or nutrition, think of it as if you stop pedaling. Initially you will only slow down, but soon you will start going backwards. The longer you go without pedaling, the further back down the hill you will slide and the harder you will have to work just to get back to where you were. Your body responds in very much the same way; when you slip up for a couple days it is fairly easy to get back into your routine, but after a week or two, it is much tougher. You may not feel as well, the same exercise routine will feel a little tougher, and you may even develop more intense cravings for unhealthy foods. Even if you ate ridiculous amounts of candy on Halloween and feel horrible today, it is still only a minor setback if you get back to your program right away. A week from now you can even be closer to your goals than you were before Halloween.

For now, your first priority should be to deal with your Halloween leftovers. If you have lots of candy and treats sitting around, chances are you will eat them. Instead, take them to work or give them away, but try to get rid of them as soon as you can. Also, if you have unopened bags and you saved the receipts, return them to the store. When the leftovers are gone, it will be much easier to get back to eating healthy and exercising.

If you can recover quickly from Halloween, you should have a good chance to get through the holiday season with minimal setbacks. If not, work hard to get back on track before thanksgiving, because it generally gets tougher from that point on.

## **Featured Article**

### **5 Tips to Help You Better Understand Food Labels**

#### **Part 2**

#### **Tip 4: Understand common labeling terms (“lite,” “light,” “reduced,” “less,” and “low”)**

Let me start off by saying that “lite” and “light” have the same meaning and are used interchangeably on nutritional labels. For the purpose of this article I will use “light” to represent both terms. If a label says “light,” the food must be an altered version of a food and have either 1/3 less calories or 1/2 the fat than the regular version (with the same weight serving size). A food can also be “light” if it is low-fat, low-calorie, and has less than 1/2 of the sodium content of the regular food. If a product uses the words “reduced” or “less” as in sugar, fat, calories, etc. it means that the product has at least 1/4 less of the particular ingredient specified than the original version of the food. Foods in their natural form, such as unprocessed fruits and vegetables can never be labeled “light,” “reduced,” or “less” even if they are low in fat, calories, and sodium. These terms only apply to foods that have been processed or have added ingredients.

The term “low” can be used in conjunction with 5 different ingredients (calories, fat, saturated fat, sodium, and cholesterol) and they are all based on a 100g (gram) serving of the food. Low-calorie = 140 calories or less per 100g serving, low-fat = 3g or 30 calories of fat or less per serving, low-saturated fat = 1g or 10 calories of saturated fat or less per serving, low-sodium = 140mg or less per serving, and low-cholesterol = 20mg of cholesterol or less and it must have 2g of saturated fat or less. You may have noticed is that there is no definition listed for low-carb. This is because there is no officially recognized or definition of low-carb and there are no restrictions for placing this label on products. If the term “low” is used with any other ingredient than the 5 listed above, it is essentially meaningless. To illustrate this point, I recently saw a package of “low-carb” rice, which was rather strange since the rice contained about 90% carbs.

Understanding these terms is a big first step, but it is important to know that just because something has a label such as “low-fat,” it does not mean the product is necessarily healthy. In some cases (usually sweets) fat calories are replaced with sugar, so the product may be lower in fat, but just as unhealthy. In other cases, natural ingredients are replaced with artificial ingredients that have fewer calories. Sometimes the added ingredients are not bad, but frequently these ingredients cause negative reactions, such indigestion or a decrease in energy level.

Additionally, some people think that if an item has less fat, sugar, etc. they can eat more of it, but in many cases people end up consuming more total calories and gaining fat even though they are eating low-fat or low-calorie products. Of course these products are generally marketed to people trying to lose weight and they essentially end up buying foods that ultimately hinder their weight loss instead of helping it. As you hopefully know after the first part of this article, you must always look past the marketing of the product and take the time to read the label.

There is one last big problem with these terms and it is most commonly associated with liquid products, although it can occur with any product. Since the terms are based on comparing equal portion sizes by weight, it means that anything added to a product that adds weight can affect

label claims. To illustrate how product labels can be manipulated, I will discuss 2 cans of coconut milk (1 regular and 1 light) that I saw in the store recently. The light version said 50% less fat on the front of the can, so of course I picked up both cans to find out why one can had so much less fat than the other. When I compared the labels I saw that everything (fat, calories, etc.) was 50% less in the lite version. Then I compared the ingredients list and found that they were identical except the lite version had a one added ingredient as the first ingredient. Can you guess what the ingredient was – water. The 2 coconut milks were technically the same except one was diluted 50%. Since water has no fat or calories it can be added to many products to make them “light” or “reduced.” In this case, buying the light version only means you get 50% less of the actual product. This is an extreme case, but adding water to make products appear healthier happens quite frequently.

### **Tip 5: Understand Net Carb Labeling:**

Net carbs values are being found on more and more product labels, especially products marketed for weight loss. Consumer awareness of the carbohydrate content of foods has increased in recent years due to the popularity of Atkins and other carb restricted diet programs. While these highly restrictive diets are not as popular as they once were, low carb foods are as popular as ever. This has led to companies labeling products with “net carbs” to attract carb conscious eaters. As with the term “low carb,” there is no approved definition or standard for calculating grams of net carbs.

Luckily however, there is a general consensus about what constitutes a net carb. The net carb value is supposed to represent the grams of carbs contained in a product that will impact your insulin levels (cause levels to increase). This is important, because higher increases in insulin result in more fat storage. The typical approach to calculating net carbs is to take the total carbohydrate content and subtract fiber, sugar alcohols, and artificial sweeteners. Any carbohydrate left over is considered a net carb. Products with lower net carbs are promoted as being better for losing fat or preventing fat gain. While there is some truth to this concept, as usual it is not the whole story.

The biggest problem with the net carb approach is it fails to account for the fact that different carbohydrates affect the body’s insulin response to different degrees. You may have heard of the glycemic index, which is a system used to determine how quickly different foods are absorbed in the body and how much they will affect insulin levels (faster absorption = higher insulin spike = more fat storage). For example, table sugar (sucrose) will cause insulin levels to rise more than fruit sugar (fructose), but they are both considered net carbs. In addition, proteins, fats, and the size of the overall meal will also affect the insulin response. Simply looking at the net carb grams does not accurately reflect how the food will affect your body.

Of course, the carbs that are removed from the “net carb” calculation (fiber, sugar alcohols, and artificial sweeteners) are noteworthy as well. Even though these ingredients are not considered net carbs, they can still have a significant impact on your body. Sugar alcohols (sorbitol, maltitol, isomalt, xylitol, etc.) are not sugar or alcohol, but they share some of the chemical properties of both. They are only partially broken down by the body, which is why they are not supposed to have an impact on insulin levels. It takes around 2 grams of sugar alcohols to

equal the number of calories in 1 gram of regular carbohydrate. The problem is that anything that cannot be broken down must still be processed and removed from your body. Consuming large amounts of sugar alcohols often results in an upset stomach. In addition, some people still experience insulin responses and feel fatigued or “crash” after consuming sugar alcohols.

Artificial sweeteners are different, because they have essentially no calories, but they can still cause an insulin response in some people. The big problem with these ingredients is that many people have negative physiological reactions to consuming them, such as feeling run down, not being able to think as clearly, or headaches. In addition, people can experience withdrawal symptoms when they initially stop consuming them (strong cravings, increased irritability, headaches, etc.). If you have noticed similar reactions yourself, try natural sweeteners, such as stevia instead.

Fiber on the other hand is worth noting because of its positive attributes. Following the insulin theme, soluble fiber will slow down the absorption of foods, which will actually improve (decrease) your insulin response. In addition it helps lower cholesterol levels and helps you feel full after meals. Much of the fiber found in foods is insoluble, which does not have much of an effect on insulin, but it is still good for you, because it will improve your intestinal health, prevent constipation, and prevent some types of cancer. Most people do not get enough fiber and increasing your intake can improve your health and your fat loss.

\* Note: If you have a low fiber intake and want to eat more, start with small increases. If you increase your fiber intake too quickly, your body will not be able to handle it and you could end up with stomach cramps or similar problems. Also, try to spread out your fiber intake over multiple meals instead of trying to get your daily requirement in one meal. Your eventual goal should be consume at least 25 grams of fiber per day.

As you can see, net carbs and carbohydrates in general can be rather confusing, especially because different individuals respond differently to the same ingredients. In any case, negative reactions become more likely when you consume larger amounts of artificial ingredients. My best advice is to become aware of how your body reacts to different foods and ingredients. For example, if you notice yourself feeling tired or fatigued after a meal, see if you feel the same way next time you eat the same foods. If you do, it's a good sign that the food contains something that your body does not like and you should limit your consumption of that food.

This concludes the 5 tips to help you better understand food labels. Hopefully this will help you view labels as sources of information instead of sources of confusion. Using these tips when shopping will enable you to choose healthier products that ultimately help you look better and feel better. As an added bonus, these tips can also save you money. Many people assume that when a product costs more it will be healthier, but this is not always the case. These tips will allow you compare products and find cheaper products that are just as healthy or high in quality as more expensive ones. It may take some time to become good at reading labels, but the rewards are well worth the effort. Try using these tips next time you are at the store or you can even just look at the products you have at home. You may be surprised at what you find.

## WRAP UP:

I hope you found this issue at least as enjoyable and informative as the first one. At this point I have received very few questions or suggestions for topics so the Q & A section has been temporarily postponed. As for the next newsletter, I will continue with some ideas to help you prepare for the holidays and wait to see if you provide me with feedback regarding specific topics that interest you. Otherwise you will just have to wait and see what I come up with.

I wish you all the best and expect my next issue to be sent out on November 16<sup>th</sup>,

Ross