

[IMAGE]

You Are What You Eat (Too Much Of)

By G. Douglas Andersen, DC, DACBSP, CCN

Anyone who has any interest in weight loss knows there has been a long-running debate regarding the primary factor that causes weight gain. Go to the weight-loss section of any bookstore and you will see the calorie, fat, carbohydrate and protein camps, each of whom insists they are the key to weight loss. They all have convincing arguments and they all can cite studies to support their opinions.

However, when I retrieve and read the evidence, I often find flaws based on lack of control regarding subject supervision. Occasionally I will come across a study that is well-controlled, but they are always short since it isn't practical to have people live in a lab for more than a few days.

Therefore, I was intrigued when I read about a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that paid people to live in a metabolic setting for three months. By allowing researchers to measure every unit of energy expenditure, the result would be expected to be much more accurate than the typical questionnaire based study or three days in a laboratory type of experiment.

Portion Control - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark The study researchers, based in Florida and Louisiana, hired 25 people (16 men and nine women) ages 18 to 35 with body mass indexes ranging from normal weight to overweight. They were then studied for 14-28 days to establish their exact calorie amount required for body-weight stabilization. Then the subjects spent eight weeks eating one of three diets that provided 40 percent more energy than they required. All three diets averaged 934 additional calories.

Each of the three weight-gain diets differed by protein and fat percentage, while carbohydrates and total calories remained stable. The researchers wanted to see if macronutrient manipulation with the same amount of excessive calories would cause differences in the amount of weight gain. The results of this study were a real eye opener, as table 2 demonstrates. The findings were:

- To gain body fat, the type of calorie makes little difference when a person eats more than they need.
- To gain body weight, which includes muscle and fat, extra protein will add muscle even without exercise.
- The average amount of protein in grams does not make much difference once the requirements are met.

The subjects were all closely monitored and did not exercise, although they did expend energy on activities of normal living. These results were from eating too much; they support strategies recommend higher percentages of dietary protein when total calories are insufficient because we diet to lose fat, not muscle.

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