

## Weight loss: moving from calorie counting to food ratios

There are many athletes who have attempted calorie counting for weight loss but the majority report this process as painful, time-consuming, and not supportive of their weight loss goals long-term. If you've been on and off the calorie counting bandwagon, you know what I mean. Calorie counting does not address the quality of foods and how each food and combination thereof affects the body's ability to burn fat. You can eat 500 calories of spaghetti or 500 calories of beans, avocado and vegetables. There is a big difference in what happens metabolically inside the body. The good news is we do not need to count calories to promote weight loss and fat burning.

So, move over calorie counting! There's a new kid on the block, so to speak, and one I like to call the "food ratio approach". This is a simple method and one that both "Type A" athletes and the "non-Type A athletes" have been able to implement successfully to achieve weight loss. You might be also happy to know that there are additional benefits: improvements in training and racing performance, better energy levels and overall health.

Here is a summary of how to implement food ratios:

1. Learn what foods are categorized as lean proteins, healthy fats, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthy starches. You may think you know, but surprisingly there are usually a few corrections to be made.
2. Identify your food preferences and assign them to the categories listed in #1 above. If you are serious and motivated, take a piece of paper and make columns for each of these categories in the order as listed. Write down your foods in the appropriate column.
3. Understand the importance of putting foods together that support stable blood sugar levels. Put very simply, stable blood sugars minimizes insulin spikes. As a consequence, fat burning happens more easily. Balancing proteins and fiber-containing vegetables and fruits supports stable blood sugar levels. Now think of "balance" in terms of "ratios". I want as close of a ratio of protein and fiber foods in each meal and snack so that blood sugar stays stable. Keep reading to learn how to put this knowledge into practical terms when it comes to our food choices and ratios.

If you do not consider yourself to be a "Type A" athlete, build your plate for each meal and snack by choosing foods from the categories or columns going from the left to the right. If we talk about the ratio of food on the plate, about 1/2 the plate is full of the lean protein and healthy fat sources with the other 1/2 of the plate full of colorful vegetables and fruits. Depending on your weight loss goals, the type of training day and the timing of the particular meal, you may opt to lower your amount of fruit and add a small serving (1/4 of the plate) of whole grain or healthy starch.

If you admittedly are one of the calorie counters and a "Type A" athlete, you can get a bit more quantitative by familiarizing yourself with the actual protein and carbohydrate content of lean proteins, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and starches.

Then, you can use simple math to put together food amounts that fulfill a 1:1 or 2:1 ratio of carbohydrate to protein. Let's provide a quick example. A serving of cooked vegetable contains 5 grams of carbohydrate. A serving of protein contains 7 grams of protein. If I have 3 servings of cooked vegetable (about 15 grams of carbohydrate) and 2 servings of protein (about 14 grams of protein), I have just put together a 1:1 ratio of carbohydrate to protein foods. Spot on! Stable blood sugars and fat burning to follow.

4. Learn how to periodize your carbohydrate intake to support your training and racing. This one involves adjusting those ratios in accordance with your energy demands but also considering your training patterns. Here is where you will indeed benefit by working closely with a qualified sports dietitian to customize the plan. The good news is that if you have followed the above steps, your body is in a better metabolic mode. You will not need as much carbohydrate to fuel you well for your training.

Putting together foods you like and enjoy, and ones in the right ratios to support stable blood sugar levels will get you on a more successful path to sustained weight loss. You will feel better and perform better as an athlete.

For more information about food ratios, refer to the Fuel4mance electronic resource "The Athlete's Food Guide to Metabolic Efficiency Training" written by Dina Griffin and Bob Seebohar. The e-book is available at [www.fuel4mance.com](http://www.fuel4mance.com).

Dina Griffin, MS, RD, CSSD  
Sport Dietitian, Fuel4mance, LLC  
[dina@fuel4mance.com](mailto:dina@fuel4mance.com)  
[www.fuel4mance.com](http://www.fuel4mance.com)