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# THE FIT HABIT

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# THE 7 HABITS

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## Of Highly Effective Fat Loss

*This is how it happened to me.*

I was in my mid to late 30's. I was running a TON and eating what I thought was a healthy, vegan(ish) diet and yet I couldn't stop gaining weight. Even worse, I was constantly "hangry". If my husband was late for dinner and I had to wait more than 8 minutes past 7pm to shovel dinner in my piehole, I became a force to be reckoned with.

It wasn't good.

But what was the problem? I was super conscious of eating low fat. Every morning I would layer my 2 (sometimes 3) pieces of toast with only the slightest hint of peanut butter. Lunch was a sandwich with low fat cheese and veggies. Dinner was pasta most nights, but I always just stuck with a low fat tomato sauce and tossed in some veggies.

*That's healthy, right?*

Not so, my friend. This was the start of my demise. I'd also snack on Popchips, or Baked Lays Potato Chips, Microwave Popcorn (fat free of course) and every other fat-zapped, food-like product I could find.

Unfortunately, what I didn't realize was that every time I ate starchy carbs, I spiked insulin. After a while, my body started saying "hey, no more insulin, okay? We have more than enough!", and started storing all those unused carbs (which turns into insulin) as fat.

So even though I was running 20 or so miles a week, I could never keep up with all the insulin I was pumping into my veins through excessive carb consumption. And the more I ran to work off the fat, the hungrier I got and then the more I ate my carbs to fill me up.

It was a cycle of ridiculousness.

Now I take a MUCH different approach to fitness and nutrition. I rarely run anymore. If I do, it's a fasted run in the morning, just a couple of miles when the urge hits. I also rarely eat starchy carbs

***"I was eating every fat-zapped, food-like product I could find"***

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anymore (note - I do eat non-starchy veggies by the busload). I certainly never eat bread or anything that contains gluten, and instead of going sparingly with that peanut butter at breakfast, it's become the main course (along with a bunch of hard boiled eggs).

The lessons I've learned over the past few years have changed the way I look, and more importantly, the way I feel. I'm rarely hungry. I look forward to my healthy fats and my waistline is a fraction of what it was becoming 2 years ago.

But that's all diet specific stuff, and although it's really important, it's useless without the implementation strategies that are necessary to take your body out of your insulin-crazed state and into fat-burning mode.

**And now for the big fat disclaimer - no small print required.**

I am not a medical professional, nor am I a registered dietician. I am a certified fitness trainer undergoing advanced training in nutrition. What follows is the knowledge and the tactical information I used to change my body composition and my relationship to food to finally achieve non-crazy-making, sustainable fat loss. There's nothing about this information that is carved in stone and I should underscore (literally) that you are ultimately the best person to determine what the right balance of nutrition is for you. If anything, I hope this simply brings some awareness to the way you eat and the quality of foods you choose.

Now let's get started!



## ***Habit 1 - Mind your starchy carbs.***

Now based on all that I've just written about the insulin merry-go-round, this should not come as a surprise. To be clear, I'm not suggesting you give up carbs entirely and opt for a bacon at breakfast lunch and dinner, but I do want to encourage you to let go of your beloved bread, pasta, cookies, cracker and pastries.

If I've just wiped out your typical breakfast go-to's, try a few of these options instead:

- 3 hard boiled eggs (eat the yolk) and some veggies (I like to sauté kale, spinach, broccoli or slice up tomato and avocado).
- A low carb protein pancake made with a gluten-free base (think coconut or almond flour)
- A veggie omelet with 3 eggs

**“I was constantly  
“hangry” (aka  
the worst blend  
of hungry and  
angry)”**

- CAREN MAGILL

For lunch, stay away from sandwiches and wraps and have a big salad with tons of veggies, a lean protein and 1 or 2 tablespoons of olive oil (salad dressings are not your friend as they're filled with sugar).

For dinner, have another protein source, lots of roasted, grilled, raw or steamed veggies and don't be shy about putting a little butter or coconut oil on them to make them taste outstanding (it really works).

Snack on things like raw almonds, olives, nut butters, veggies and cottage cheese rather than crackers or fat-free cardboard chip-like things.

These are just a few ideas to get you started. The key here is to avoid baked goods unless their gluten and preferably grain free, high protein and no added sugars like my [Protein Pancake Mix](#) (shameless plug, sorry).

**Want to learn more? I love [this article](#) that lists 23 different peer-reviewed studies that indicate that low carb diets are superior for fat loss than the traditionally suggested low fat diet.**

## ***Habit 2 - Step away from the sugar bowl.***

Actually, it's much more than that. Sugar is in most prepared foods so this is a big habit to conquer. Start by reading labels. You'll be surprised to see how many things contain some form of sugar or artificial sweetener. And to be clear, whether you like it or not, raw, unprocessed, cultivated from Buddhist bees honey, and/or anything that comes in a pink, blue or yellow sachet is still sugar. It goes in the mouth and becomes glucose, which spikes insulin. Too much glucose becomes too much insulin which becomes too much fat. End of story.

What you CAN do is start using Stevia or sugar alcohols like Xylitol or Erythritol. These are natural sweeteners that are not like the ones above and are processed differently in the body than sugar resulting in little to no insulin spikes. You can buy this stuff at Whole Foods or even on Amazon.com. Get a box of the small sachets so you can carry some around in your purse when you head to Starbucks.

This is a great starting point. As you get used to these new sources of sweet, play with baking your own treats with them. That's how I sweeten ProCakes and they are truly outstanding without any sign of maple syrup.

Want to learn more? [Here's some further info](#) on sugar alcohols and their benefits over regular sugar.

## ***Habit 3 - Sleep like it's your full time job.***

Sleep is so incredibly vital to your fat loss process, I'd almost want to put this as the mother of all habits. If you don't have good sleep in your life, you're setting yourself up for failure.

Sleep releases hormones that tell your body that you're full after an appropriate amount of food. So, those days where you can't stop craving and eating carbs? You probably had inadequate sleep the night before.

Sleep also keeps your willpower in check, your mood stable and your mind clear. Without it, you're hosed, so please - commit to doing whatever you have to do to get 8 hours of ZZZ's (at least). I typically aim for 9.

**Want to know more? [Here's a great article](#) that goes into more detail and points to specific research.**



## ***Habit 4 - Amp up your healthy fats.***

Yeah baby! This is the BEST habit because fats ROCK. They make your food taste amazing and also keep you fuller longer. There's also a bunch of hormonal benefits and it will keep your hair all shiny and gorgeous.

Healthy fats include:

- Coconut oil
- Grass-fed butter
- Olives and olive oil
- Nuts and seeds and their butters
- Avocado
- QUALITY fatty meats (not the stuff at Safeway sister)
- Salmon and other fatty ocean-caught fish (that weren't raised in a fish farm).

***A quick note about the meats.*** There's a hole bunch of science around omega 6 vs 3s and how they should be balanced. Long story short, if you have too much omega 6, your body will hold onto belly fat for dear life. Although omega 6's are not inherently bad, they need to be balanced appropriately, so stay away from crappy grocery store meats. No factory farms for you! Get your meats from a reputable butcher, [online right here](#), or just pass altogether. Same goes for eggs. QUALITY IS KEY and it also makes a big difference to the animals you're consuming.

**And just so you know... you don't have to eat meat if you don't want to. There's plenty of healthy fats that are vegetarian and vegan, so knock your sweet heart out if that's you.**

***How much fat should you eat?*** That's ultimately up to your body. Start at 40% of your total calories then go up from there and see how you respond. At the point where you feel great and not starving, is the point that's right for you. Personally, I eat around 60-70% healthy fats, and that works great for me, but everyone is different.

**Want to learn more? Here's [a fabulous article](#) to learn more about our over abundance of Omega 6 fatty acids and why it's harmful and [another great article](#) espousing the benefits of healthy fats.**

**I also recommend the book [Why Women Need Fat by William Lassek](#). It's a great, research-based resource for understanding the need for healthy fats in our diet.**

## ***Habit 5 - Track your calories - but only for a bit.***



I think you should do this only long enough that you have a good grasp on how much you’re eating on a regular basis. Once you know how much you’re eating, and the breakdown of macronutrients you’re consuming (more on this in a minute), you’ll start to get a sense of whether or not you’re eating too much, or not enough.

I recommend using [MyFitnessPal.com](https://www.myfitnesspal.com) as it’s free, easy and has record of most foods

It’s also a good practice to weigh and measure food so you know exactly how much your portions are. I know I’m horrible at eyeballing food, and I’ve been doing this for a LONG time. So get yourself some

measuring cups and a food scale (they’re pretty cheap at Target or on Amazon) and start getting a little scientific with your food. This process is invaluable for long term success.

**Want to learn more? Here’s [the Mayo Clinic’s take on calorie counting](#).**

## ***Habit 6 - Learn your macros.***

Macros (macronutrients) are fats, protein and carbs. Most foods have a combination of all 3, but typically there’s one overriding macro (ie, bread is almost entirely carbs, but has some protein and a little fat). If you have no idea how many grams of protein are in a 5 ounce chicken breast or how many carbs are in a 1/2 cup of broccoli, not to worry. That’s also why you’re doing habit 5 - to learn this stuff. Once you know it, you can pretty much trust yourself to figure out your own diet for the rest of your life.

How many macros should you aim for? That’s again, up to you and only you can know best. Most people looking to lose weight should eat somewhere around 10 to 12 times their bodyweight in total calories and I recommend starting fat calories at least 40% of your total diet, then splitting carbs and protein between the remaining 60%. Again, this isn’t a hard and fast rule, but a baseline to start from. You can tweak from there based on your energy and hunger levels.

**So, as a 135lbs woman, my total calories might look like this:**

135lbs x 12 = 1620 total calories per day

- 40% of that can be fat calories, which is 648 calories
- 30% of that can be non-starchy carbs which is 486 calories
- 30% of that can be protein calories which is 486 calories

A quick tip about calorie counting - a gram of carbohydrate is 4 calories and so is a gram of protein. A gram of fat is 9 calories and a gram of alcohol is 7. So based on the quick math I did above, 648 calories of fat divided by 9 = 72 grams of fat per day and you would divide by 4 with protein and carbs.

PS - if all this feels like too much math, just track your food on [myfitnesspal.com](http://myfitnesspal.com) and it will do the math for you. Easy peasy.

Ultimately you should find a balance of macros that works for you, but the key thing is to choose non-starchy carbs, so say tootleloo to grain-based bread-like things, avoid potatoes (for a while) and stick with green or brightly colored veggies instead.

Basically, if it is, or comes from something that can be white (like bread, pasta, rice, noodles) then avoid it. If it comes from a grain, look the other way. If it has added sugar - run, don't walk in the opposite direction. If you want treats, look for high protein, low carb options with no added sugar. They are out there, I assure you.

Want to learn more? I think [this article](#) sums it up really well.

## ***Habit 7 - Learn to cook.***

I find that a lot of women who complain about not being able to lose weight, are often also complaining that they don't have time/desire/skills to cook.

Here's the thing. If you don't learn to cook, you're not going to succeed long term. Jenny Craig be damned - we all need to know how to prepare good food that we can enjoy. I'm not suggesting that you become a chef by any means, but roasting veggies, grilling protein and melting butter really isn't rocket science. It's actually fun once you get the hang of it.

If you're cooking for 1, try making a few meals at once so it doesn't seem like such a hassle for yourself. If you're cooking for a bunch of people, let them know that this is how they are going to eat from now on. Either put down the gauntlet or make it a fun, collaborative thing, but at the end of the day, you have to make healthy, whole food meals for yourself in order to lean out.

***Calorie Math***  
A gram of carbs = 4 calories  
A gram of protein = 4 calories  
A gram of fats = 9 calories  
A gram of alcohol = 7 calories



Just google healthy easy recipes and see where that takes you, or start a healthy recipe collection on Pinterest. After a while, you get used to it and maybe even learn to love it.



## ***A Note About Fitness.***

You may (or may not) be curious as to why I don't mention fitness as one of the major fat loss habits. I purposely did not address it as fitness is not critical to fat loss. Nutrition is. Fitness can certainly help things along (a lot), but that doesn't necessarily mean taking up a running program or donning your spandex and hitting the gym. Fitness can be walking every day, taking a hike or doing yoga a couple of times a week, but overall, your movement is not nearly as critical to fat loss as your nutrition and sleep. It is however, critical to long term health, so I'm not poo-pooing it.

So that's it! I hope you enjoyed The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Weight Loss. If you have questions, please leave a comment on the blog and I will respond. If you're interested in investing in a weight loss consultation with me, [send me an email](#). We can work together once and I will create a customized plan you can run with, or we can do ongoing monthly coaching.

Good luck and have FUN with this. Don't try to take on all the habits at once, but try to master one at a time. I recommend starting with sleep :)

To your health,

Caren Magill, CPT



## *About The Author*

With a passion for health and fitness and a geeky interest in human behavior, Caren Magill breaks down the process of creating healthy habits into doable bite-sized choices that anyone can master. She moved to California from Toronto in 2006 to pursue a career in high tech but was inspired to make a life change after losing her mother to cancer. Since then, Caren has blazed a trail of personal “firsts” – from half Ironman’s and fitness competitions to obtaining a yoga teaching certification in India and a becoming a NASM certified personal trainer.

Her passion for entrepreneurship was inspired by her time in Silicon Valley, and she went on to acquire the Southern California franchise of Ladies Who Launch, a business supporting women entrepreneurs, while completing a Master’s degree in Social Change at UCLA/Fielding Graduate University. Upon graduation Caren sold the business and went on to work in behavior modification surrounding energy conservation for Southern California Gas Company. But it wasn’t long before the entrepreneurial urge struck again, and Caren moved on to launch [ProCakes](#), a healthy food company with a mission to deliver protein-packed comfort food to people who care about looking and feeling their best without compromising their favorite foods.

You can learn more about Caren at [ProCakes.com](#) or at her health and fitness website [TheFitHabit.com](#).



