



'Water weight' easy to lose at first

Whenever I make a concerted effort to watch my diet, I lose a lot of weight very quickly — sometimes 5 to 7 pounds within the first week or two. But after that, it's much harder to lose weight. I've always heard that those first pounds are "water." Is that true?

That's probably exactly what they are.

When you first start a diet and eat fewer calories, the body responds by getting the extra calories it needs from the easiest source — muscle protein. That's true no matter what the composition is of the calories that you consume — protein, carbohydrate, fat — whatever.

But protein also holds water, so when your muscle protein is burned as a fuel source, water is released and you eliminate it from your body.

Water might not have any calories, but it does have weight. Remember the old saying, "A pint is a pound, the world around?" Well, if you pee an extra pint (two cups) of urine over the course of a few days, you'll lose a pound just from that effort.

However, your body won't continue to draw calories from muscle. As it adjusts to the reduced calories you're consuming, it will begin to get the energy it needs from the stored fat in your body (which is really what you want to happen, right?). When stored fat is used, weight loss slows because water isn't released as it is when protein breaks down.

Don't let yourself get discouraged. Losing weight takes time and tenacity. You'll lose a pound of fat for every 3,500 calories extra you expend over your intake. So, if you consume 1,500 calories a day (or 10,500 a week) and burn 2,000 calories a day in energy expenditure (or 14,000 a week), you can count on losing a pound a week.

How do you know how many calories you burn? Well, it depends on a lot of things — on your body size, your age, your activity level, your metabolism rate. One thing is for sure: You can increase the calories you burn by becoming more active. Find a way to do that, and weight loss becomes much easier.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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By Martha Filipic
(614) 292-9833
filipic.3@osu.edu

Editor:

This column was reviewed by Sharron Coplin, nutrition associate with Ohio State University Extension in the College of Human Ecology.

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Section of Communications and Technology News & Media Relations

2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1044
(614) 292-2011

208 Research Services
Building
Wooster, Ohio 44691-4096
(330) 263-3780

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