

## THINK BALANCE—NOT SACRIFICE

*Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishments.*

—Anonymous

It's no wonder that many people quickly ditch New Year's resolutions to improve their health and increase their wealth. One reason is the negative feelings associated with words like "diet" and "budget." Immediately, we think of the three C's (cut back, cut out, and can't) or the three D's (denial, deprivation, and don't) and resist making a change. This is unfortunate because positive behavior changes aren't about making big sacrifices... they're about balance and tradeoffs. Whether it's the "energy balance" involved with weight management or the "money balance" (a.k.a., cash flow) associated with managing personal finances, the process is the same: you need to balance intake and outgo. To lose weight, you must maintain a "negative energy balance" by burning off more calories with exercise and daily activity than you consume. To save money, you need "positive cash flow," which means having income greater than expenses. Despite lots of marketing hype, there are no magic tickets to weight loss and saving money other than "eat less and exercise more" and "spend less and save more."

Lets start with your health. *Energy balance* is the difference between the energy you consume from food and beverages and the energy that your body burns in physical activity. This energy is measured in calories. The math is pretty simple. Each pound of stored body fat represents 3,500 calories. In order to lose one pound, a person must eat 3,500 fewer calories, burn 3,500 calories through exercise, or better still, combine calorie reductions with physical activity. For sustained weight loss, it is recommended that no more than two pounds (7,000 calories) be lost per week. Doctors often suggest a 10% weight loss, achieved over a six-month period, as an initial goal.

Between 1960 and 2002, the average U.S. men's and women's weight increased from 166 to 191 pounds and from 140 to 164 pounds, respectively. On average, peo-

ple consume 800,000 to 900,000 calories per year. If you've found yourself steadily gaining weight, your energy balance is "out of balance" because you are taking in more calories than you are burning off. The good news is small steps are all that are needed to reverse the trend. Losing 10 pounds in a year can be done with exercise, less eating, or a combination of the two. Here are some examples.

- Add 15 minutes of brisk walking (one mile at 4 mph) daily to burn off 100 calories.
- Make dietary modifications, such as eliminating a tablespoon of butter or soft drink to cut 100 calories.
- Walk briskly (4 mph) for 10 minutes and eat half a slice of bread or drink half a can of soda.

Here are some common activities and the number of calories that can be burned per hour by a person weighing 150 pounds: bicycling 5 mph (174), bicycling 13 mph (612), dancing (210), golfing without a cart (324), light housework (246), tennis (312), and walking 2 mph (198).

Some commonly eaten foods that contain 100 calories include 1 tbsp. mayonnaise, 1 tbsp. butter or margarine, 8 oz. cola beverage, 8 oz. beer, 6 to 7 French fries (2" × 1/2" × 1/2"), 1 1/2 tbsp. salad dressing, 8 to 9 medium potato chips, 3 tbsp. coffee cream, 1 medium-sized cookie, 5 oz. wine, 2 1/2 cups popcorn with oil, 2 "snack size" candy bars, and 1 slice bread. Substitutions are another way to save 100 (or more) calories. Two examples are using water-packed tuna instead of oil-packed, and 1% or 2% milk instead of whole milk. Low-fat or reduced-fat foods and condiments can also help reduce caloric intake.

Changing just one habit can have an enormous impact. For example, replacing a workday doughnut habit with an English muffin could save 350 calories a day or 91,000 calories annually (350 × 260 = 91,000), which

adds up to 26 pounds of weight loss in a year (91,000 divided by 3,500). Similarly, 45 minutes of brisk (4 mph) walking burns up about 244 calories. If this is done every day, 89,060 extra calories are burned in a year (244 × 365). Divide this number by 3,500 and this translates into a one-year weight loss of 25 pounds. The take-home message is that “calories count.”

The USDA ChooseMyPlate recommendations have been developed for the American diet to keep dietary intake “balanced” with suggestions for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) to explore healthy eating and physical activity recommendations. The site includes nutritional information for over 8,000 foods that provide a quick reference for weekly menu planning. Sample menus based on a 2,000 calorie per day food pattern over seven days provide suggestions for balanced meals with all the MyPlate food groups. Tips are included for healthy eating when away from home.

Simple messages for consumers to follow from the Choose MyPlate website include:

- **Balance your calories by enjoying your food, but eat less food.** Aim for avoiding oversized portions and make physical activity a part of your daily routine! Start by doing 10 minutes of activity and taking “small steps” to increase activities. Aim for 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise or 75 minutes per week of vigorous activity.
- **Increase the amount of fruits and vegetables in your diet.** Vary the vegetables you eat by choosing raw or cooked, fresh, frozen, canned, or dried/dehydrated. They may be served whole, cut, or mashed.
- **Make at least half of your grains whole grains** that contain the entire grain kernel – the bran, the germ, and the endosperm. Some examples include whole-wheat flour, bulgur or cracked wheat, oatmeal, whole cornmeal, and brown rice.
- **Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) dairy products.**
- **Select lean or low-fat meat and poultry foods.** The USDA recommends including at least 8 ounces of cooked seafood per week for adults.
- **Reduce the consumption of sodium.** Compare the amounts of sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals. Choose foods with lower amounts of sodium.

- **Make water your drink of choice rather than consuming sugary drinks.**

Let’s extend the “balance” concept to personal finances. There’s a popular saying: “If your outgo exceeds your income, then your upkeep will be your downfall.” Cash flow is the relationship between income and expenses, including savings for future goals such as retirement. Ideally, your cash flow should be a positive number because this means you are living below your means. If you continually spend more than you earn, you will have a negative cash flow. As a result, you will eventually go broke. There are three ways to achieve positive cash flow: increase income, decrease expenses, or a combination of the two.

Increasing income is usually the most difficult method because others often make the decisions (e.g., your salary). Yet, there are ways to increase income such as upgrading job skills, a second job or overtime, a side-line business, publicly-provided benefits, tax write-offs such as the earned income tax credit, charging adult children “rent” for living at home, selling possessions, and bartering.

People generally have more options to reduce expenses and bring them in line with income. One way to do this is “The 10% Solution.” This simply means trying to save 10% of your gross income annually by reducing flexible household expenses, such as food, clothing, and entertainment. Over time, the results can be awesome. Some people say there’s no way they could save this much. Perhaps 5% is a more realistic figure, which can be slowly increased over time. The trick to “finding” money to save is tracking household expenses for several months to identify those that can be reduced. See Strategy 1: *Track Your Current Behavior* that starts on page 17.

One place where significant savings can often be found is the family food bill. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (August 2012), a middle-income family of four spends an average of \$235.70 a week for food eaten at home. Ten percent of that is \$23.57 or an annual savings of over \$1,200 (23.57 × 52). The next time you go food shopping, take a good look at what’s in the cart before checking out. Are there expensive snacks or convenience foods that you can do without or make yourself? Are you comparing the cost of store and “name” brands and taking advantage of coupons and promotions? An-

other way to decrease food expenses is to reduce the amount spent on food eaten away from home.

Apply the “10% Solution” cost cutting process to other household expenses: clothing, gifts, entertainment, personal care, etc. Also, determine if there are ways to reduce large expenses such as housing (e.g., refinancing mortgage) and insurance (e.g., policy discounts). By combining savings in several expense categories, it is often possible to save 10% of your gross income without feeling deprived. This is especially true when cuts are made to “big ticket” items.

Here are some estimated monthly savings amounts from the Consumer Federation of America’s *America Saves* program: save 50 cents a day in loose change (\$15), substitute coffee for cappuccino (\$40), bring lunch to work (\$60), buy grocery store brands (\$10), eliminate premium cable channels (\$20), use fewer phone features (\$10). For additional ideas, visit [www.AMERICASAVES.ORG](http://www.AMERICASAVES.ORG).

One final caution about energy balance and money balance: be prepared to adjust to changed circumstances. If you injure your leg and can’t exercise for a while, you’ll need to reduce your food intake by the number of calories you are *not* burning, so as not to gain weight. Ditto for an “injury” to your income, such as disability or unemployment. You’ll need to reduce flexible expenses as much as possible and avoid the common error of maintaining your previous lifestyle with loans and credit cards.

Are you ready to make changes to your energy balance

and/or money balance? Complete Worksheet 9, *Energy Balance*, page 36, and Worksheet 10, *Financial Balance*, page 37, by brainstorming ideas to improve your health and increase your wealth.

---

## — Action Steps —

### Health

- Consult restaurant or food product websites and nutrition labels to increase your awareness of food caloric values.
- Use exercise equipment with displays that indicate the number of calories burned.
- Take action to increase physical activity and reduce the number of calories consumed.

### Wealth

- Consult personal finance books or websites for information about budgeting and expense reduction.
  - Download and use the *Spending Plan Worksheet* at [WWW.RCE.RUTGERS.EDU/MONEY2000](http://WWW.RCE.RUTGERS.EDU/MONEY2000).
  - Take action to increase income and reduce household expenses.
-

Worksheet 9

Energy Balance

Strategies To Reduce My Calorie Intake

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Strategies to Increase My Physical Activity

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Worksheet 10

Financial Balance

Strategies To Increase My Income

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Strategies to Decrease My Expenses

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.