

Even in cycling, you are what you eat

“I’ve started riding my bicycle more but I don’t seem to be losing weight,” is a lament I often hear. I repeat the time-tested equation – calories ingested versus calories burned. Don’t misunderstand me. Cycling is one of the best exercises for a cardio workout. But if one doesn’t keep an eye on calories, it’s easy to consume more than one works off.

Studies have shown that a majority of people underestimate how many calories they have eaten and conveniently overestimate how many calories they have burned off.

While no one would see a high fat/sugared fruit pie as a health food, a significant portion of Americans consume “natural” foods and liquids as if the calories don’t count. An energy drink has as many calories as a soda pop and an energy bar has calories equivalent to a candy bar, albeit healthier calories.

On the other hand, cutting calories is a disastrous strategy on exercise-intensive days.

I eat reasonably healthy when I compete but I don’t lose weight. For instance, at 4:30 a.m. one Saturday, I started gearing up to do my share in the Lyle Pearson 200 four-person relay from Boise to Sun Valley, Idaho. I knew that I had to have energy to pedal four relay legs totaling 92 miles in distance and 5,900 feet in elevation gained.

Before dawn, I ate old-fashioned oatmeal/brown sugar – 500 calories.

As the day wore on, I would consume:

- 800 calories – four water bottles of Cytomax
- 2,000 calories – four thick peanut butter/jelly sandwiches
- 300 calories – two servings of sweet potato chips
- 337 calories – one natural Papa Giki dark chocolate-flax-almond cookie
- 450 calories – three of my wife’s oatmeal/chocolate cookies
- 80 calories – one fat-free tapioca pudding cup
- 500 calories – two Clif energy bars
- 400 calories – 40 spice drops (later stages of race)
- 800 calories – 40 ounces chocolate milk
- 140 calories – three Newton fig thins
- 1,000 calories – lasagna dinner with garlic toast and salad.



If one doesn’t lose weight on cycling alone, why do it? The reasons are endless: developing friendships, taking on a challenge, overall health benefits, seeing different places, keeping blood pressure/cholesterol in check and just for fun.

My weight loss comes on non-intensive days. Cycling has been the catalyst for my eating healthier foods throughout the year. I eat a lot more vegetables, fruits, lean meat and a lot less processed foods.