

# The secret to weight loss



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I have finally discovered the secret to weight loss, and it involves math.

I've never been obese, but I found myself slowly gaining weight through my 30s and 40s. Before I knew it, I tipped the scales at about 190 pounds. That might be a great number for some people, but for my 5-foot-8 frame that was clearly overweight. According to the BMI (Body Mass Index) charts, I should weigh 164 or less.

Through modest exercise, I was able to shed a little, but was averaging a loss of only a pound or two per year. At that rate, I might be dead before I reached my BMI goal.

A 12-day backpacking trip to Philmont in 2010 served as a wake-up call. I started exercising that year like never before. In fact, as of this writing, I've now

gone 895 consecutive days getting into my target heart range for at least 30 minutes. In 2012, I averaged 64 minutes a day.

Despite the exercise, my weight stubbornly stuck at 178 for a whole year. Then I discovered "The Hacker's Diet." This is the best dieting book I've ever read. (Actually, it's the only dieting book I've ever read.)

"The Hacker's Diet" is a free book written by John Walker, the founder of Autodesk Software. You can read the whole book on the web or download it to your Kindle. This book treats dieting and weight control from an engineering and management standpoint — now THIS language I can understand!

In the preface, Walker says, "I had never approached controlling my weight the way I'd work on any other problem: a malfunctioning circuit, a buggy program, an ineffective department in my company?"

I don't have the space to rehash the whole book here, so let me cut to the chase. The secret to losing weight is:

**EAT LESS THAN YOU BURN!**

Walker points out that while exercising does cause your body

to burn more calories, the effects don't make a big difference: "An hour of jogging is worth about one Whooper."

I had the exercise thing down, but just wasn't careful enough about what I ate. And I do love to eat — especially delicacies like French silk pie and anything made with dark chocolate.

Is there any hope for me, an avowed sweet-tooth? Yes! All I have to do is eat less than I burn. And that means KEEPING TRACK.

Being a hacker (computer expert) himself, Walker produced all kinds of cumbersome Excel spreadsheets and charts when he wrote the book in 1991. Thankfully, that is all replaced now with a web page and an iPod app.

The web page tracks your weight. The problem with daily weightings are that they fluctuate so much. The typical human body sees a throughput of 13 pounds per day! His method to cut through the noise and see what's really going on is to use a rolling average. Not just any rolling average, mind you, but a "20-day exponentially smoothed rolling average with floaters and sinkers."

Seeing that chart take shape is very motivating. Twice in the past quarter, I could clearly see where my steady loss leveled out for a bit. One was during Easter week, when we enjoyed all-you-can-eat meal at Picanha Brazilian Steakhouse, among other special events. The other level spot was a Boy Scout campout with unlimited fried fish, thanks to assistant scoutmaster Cory Krizan.

Neither blip in the graph was a surprise, since I track everything I eat on a free app called "My Fitness Pal" (MFP). MFP is available both on the web and on my iPod, so it's effortless to click a few buttons every time I put something in my mouth. The nutritional data for almost any food you can imagine has already been entered by someone else.

Being slightly hungry once in a while is a new feeling during this process. It's not a crash diet by any means: Just a 500-calorie daily deficit will lead to a loss of one pound per week.

Since I finished the book on March 10, I've lost an average of 0.92 pounds per week. Not bad! I am down to 167 pounds, lighter than I've been for 20 years, and

I've had to drill three more holes in my Philmont belt. I have absolutely no doubt that I'll reach my BMI goal of 164 pounds — I could probably even tell you the day.

And I'm not exactly depriving myself, either — I've kept up my usual breakfast of two eggs, potatoes, ham, grapefruit, and steel-cut oats with milk and brown sugar. Not to mention my fresh-baked home-made Ghirardelli chocolate chip cookie every night for dessert, and various other dark chocolate delights. I still eat three meals and snacks, but I'm careful now to make sure that my daily input is 500 less than my output.

In fact, it's so easy that maybe I won't stop at 164 pounds after all. If I keep going at this rate until our next Philmont trip in June 2014, I'll be down to 108 pounds! Although my ability to carry a heavy backpack might require that I eventually converge on an asymptote before then.

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