

Guess I'm just a 'slow loser'



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I am such a loser! I may not be "The Biggest Loser," but at least I'm a "slow loser." By depriving myself of only a few hundred calories a day, I have enjoyed a very slow but steady decline in my body weight since mid-March.

When I covered this topic in my May 16 column after getting down to 167 pounds, I speculated that I might not even stop losing when I reached my formerly unimaginable weight of 164. (That's where the Body Mass Index charts say a 5-foot-8 person would no longer be overweight.)

Well, guess what? I, in fact, did not stop!

I am finding this "Hacker's Diet" so easy to do that I sailed right past 164, and even on to 160. I needed a new goal, so lately I've been targeting the Mike Arneson milestone. Mike is

an engineer I've worked with for 22 years. He's the same height as I am but remarkably has maintained a rock-solid consistent weight of 155 pounds.

As my steady progress continued, I thought, why not be like Mike?

Well, last Thursday I hit pay-dirt — 155 pounds! Of course, my 20-day exponentially smoothed rolling-average (ZODESRA) is still 156.4, so I can't truly celebrate until that curve crosses 155. But I can predict quite accurately when that will occur, thanks to the free Web application provided by the Hacker's Diet.

In a nutshell, the Hacker's Diet — written by Autocad software author John Walker — is a free online book that inspired me to action. The main point is that when trying to lose weight, the only thing that matters is calories in vs. calories out. And by tracking your weight with that special graph, you can see what's really happening, allowing you to ignore the daily fluctuations.

Despite the name, it is NOT a normal kind of diet. I continue to eat any food I want, any time I want. The only catch is that I try

to consume 500 fewer calories than I burn each day.

I have found this process to be not only relatively painless but actually kind of fun. I use another free app and Web page, MyFitnessPal.com (MFP), to track my food and exercise each day. It's like playing a video game with the prize being your health!

It's hard to argue with the numbers:

Month	Weight	*Loss
March	176.4	0.90
April	174.5	1.01
May	169.9	1.02
June	165.9	0.63
July	163.4	0.66
Aug.	161.5	0.82
Sept.	158.4	0.57

*Weight loss in (ZODESRA) pounds/week.

The graph for the first three months was almost spot-on with the prediction of a loss of one pound per week. The curve tapered off a bit in the summer months, but so what? It's still going the right direction.

I've learned a few important points. First, what happens if I were to stop keeping track?

That's exactly what I did when we went on an eight-day canoe trip in the BWCA. I didn't

record anything during that time, and ate whatever food that was in front of me. The result? My weight was flat for that period. No loss — but then, no gain either.

It didn't bother me that the graph flat-lined for a week, since I have no particular time goal here. And this agreed with Walker's experience, that it is no harder for him to maintain his weight at 145 than it was at 215 pounds.

The second thing I've learned is that you can go wild for one day.

A trip to the Minnesota State Fair is incomplete without cov-
ering the basic food groups:
deep-fried cheese curds, Dairy Building malts, Pronto Pups,
butter-soaked corn on the cob,
and of course Tom Thumb
donuts. At the end of that glorious day, MFP showed a whopping 1,500 calorie surplus, above and beyond those burned off by eight miles of walking.

But even that was not as big a deal as it might seem. First, my daily budget is already set for 500 calories less than break-even. So I actually took in only 1,000 extra calories for the day. Since every 3,500 calories correlates to one pound, I really

gained only one-third of a pound that day.

In other words, you can pig out for a whole day, and gain only five ounces. Of course, that would add up quickly if every day were like that. But once in a while? No problem. Weight control is more about daily routines over the long term.

I'm finding this so easy and interesting, I'm not quite sure when to stop. If I could pick any weight, what should it be? I honestly don't know.

Maybe I should try for a BMI of 21.7, which is midway in the "normal" range of 18.5-24.9. That would put me at 143 pounds. Seems like a stretch goal, but then so did 155 in June, and 164 in April, and even 178 a year ago.

One thing I do know: Despite how much fun it is to control my weight through eating, at some point it will have to level off — you can't be a loser forever. In the meantime, I think I still have room to grow — er, shrink.

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