



Law Enforcement and Nutrition

By Kathleen Vonk

STREET FIT

Why does it seem so hard to eat right and stay fit? Why is it such a task to count calories and to “just say no” to that second helping or to that chocolate dessert? It seems hard because it really is hard. It does take effort. But let’s face it...you know you feel better when you eat healthy and work out. And as an added benefit, you perform your job better. In this profession, that’s a huge benefit because any incident can turn into a life-and-death struggle.

From a simple trouble with subject to a domestic turned deadly, your life may depend on whether you can outlast the suspect in a violent struggle. Although training plays a part, fitness does as well. And, yes, proper nutrition does equate to better physical and mental performance. If it didn’t, college and professional athletes wouldn’t care about what they ate, what their protein to carbohydrate to fat ratios were, or what legal supplements they took.

Since cardiovascular disease is the number one killer of law enforcement officers, making healthy nutrition choices and staying physically fit will add years and quality of life with your family, well beyond retirement and into your second career if you so choose.

Most police officers do care about



Most officers DO care about their health, fitness and weight.

their health, fitness levels, and weight. Most, however, have no idea how much they actually eat in a day, and weight gain in the form of body fat slowly shows up over the years. From saturated and trans fats to soy products to omega-3 fatty acids to fruits and vegetables, it can all be pretty confusing.

Is it really that difficult though? How hard can it be to understand the good, the bad, and the ugly when it comes to making good nutritional choices throughout the day? Do you choose the apple or the bag of chips? Let's try to simplify the process and take it step by step.

CALORIES

First, let's figure out how many calories you actually require each day. Then we'll figure out the protein, carbohydrate, and fat ratios. You'll only have to do this once, so work through it, and you'll have your numbers until your age or weight significantly changes.

BMR stands for basal metabolic rate, i.e., your "metabolism." This equates to the amount of calories you burn at rest in a 24-hour period and can be figured using the Harris-Benedict equation. Men: $66 + (6.23 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (12.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (6.8 \times \text{age in years})$. Women: $665 + (4.35 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (4.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (4.7 \times \text{age in years})$.

Once you have determined your minimum calories for the day, you can figure your maximum calories by multiplying your BMR by your activity factor. This will depend on your goals and physical activity level each day. For weight loss, multiply your BMR by 1.1; if your goal is to maintain your current weight and you are sedentary, multiply by 1.2; if you are lightly active (light exercise 1-3 days/week), multiply by 1.375; if you are moderately active (moderate exercise 3-5 days/week), multiply by 1.5; if you are very active (hard exercise 5-6 days/week), multiply

by 1.725; and if you partake in a special forces-type training program or exercise very hard two times each day every day, multiply your BMR by 1.9.

Take Officer Joe Chubby, for example. He is a 30-year-old male, 5'11" tall and weighs 230 pounds. Plug him into the Harris-Benedict equation for males. $66 + (6.23 \times 230) + (12.7 \times 71) - (6.8 \times 30) = 2,196$ calories per day. Round this off to 2,200 calories/day. His goal is weight loss, so multiply 2,200 by 1.1 to get 2,420 calories/day. In most cases, calories consumed in a day should never go below 1,200, because this will depress your metabolism and cause a troublesome starvation cycle, making it more difficult to take and keep unwanted weight off.

SIMPLE TIPS

If the Harris-Benedict Equation seems too complicated, simply start counting your calories and writing the information down every day. This will at least help you to accurately read labels and pay attention to portion sizes. Then, with weight loss as a goal, subtract 500 calories from your average over those two weeks and try to stay at or below your new number for the weeks to come. When you become comfortable with this new routine, venture out and delve into the carbohydrate, fat, and protein ratios.

Too much, too soon can easily cause frustration and misery, so take it slow and be patient. The weight gain is tallied over the course of several years, so don't expect it to come off and stay off in a few weeks. There are also free BMR calculators online; all you have to do is plug in your personal stats and the program will figure your daily calories for you.

Packing a lunch and having pre-planned food in the patrol car can help avoid times of extreme hunger when fast food restaurants make nutritious choices difficult. It's hard to avoid that

drive-through when you've just cleared a three-hour traffic point on an empty stomach. Having food available in your lunch box and eating a few hundred calories every few hours or so also ensures that you have a consistent blood sugar level.

This not only helps avoid times of extreme hunger but also equates to instant energy to your brain and muscles if needed. It also guarantees that you are getting proper nutrition, because you have packed it yourself and made sure that you stuck to your calorie, protein and fat requirements.

Variety and moderation are keys. Choose colorful, natural foods (and lots of them) because fruits and veggies are full of nutrients and low in calories. Foods high in man-made or manipulated processed foods such as potato chips and cookies are high in chemicals, fat, and calories, so avoid them as much as possible.

Both fat and carbohydrates are burned during aerobic exercise, but the longer the session, the higher percentage of the energy provided comes from fat. When the session starts, carbohydrates are the primary source of energy with fat being a secondary contributor, but as the session goes on, more fat and fewer carbohydrates are utilized. By the time the 60-minute mark is reached the primary source of fuel comes from fat.

Although fat is used during aerobic exercise, it cannot be used as fuel to the body in very intense physical activity such as in an all-out sprint or a fight with a suspect. In these cases, carbohydrates are the primary source for energy and muscle metabolism. This is another reason why carbohydrates should comprise the majority of calories consumed each day, especially for an officer who works the street and runs the daily risk of physical encounters.

Combining exercise with appropriate nutrition is the recommended method to losing weight and bettering health, rather than one or the other.

Remember to have fuel in your system before your workout to reap the benefits of exercise, such as a simple carbohydrate sports drink. It is equally important to replenish your system within an hour of your fitness session, with two to three hundred calories including both carbohydrates and protein.

Chocolate milk (skim or low fat) is an excellent post-exercise drink, and if you're looking for a snack near bedtime, go for a serving of low fat cottage cheese to ward off the initiation of the starvation state that begins several hours after sleep begins. Lastly, remember that you have to eat to lose weight! Skipping meals can depress metabolism, destroy energy levels, and lower insulin sensitivity, which is detrimental to glucose storage (fuel for your brain and muscles).

Figure your numbers. Plan your meals. Eat up and lose weight! Adopt the attitude, "Just Do It!"

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