

THE CIGARETTE MAN'S STORY

PRELUDE

This is a personal memoir, and is not intended to be anything so grand as a research paper.

Although there is no new science in it, it relates things that happened to my weight over a period of 35 years and how I managed to invent ways of controlling the problem without yet making myself miserable.

The essay also describes how I came to hold dieticians in contempt.

EARLY DAYS

I come from a family who are rake-thin in youth, but go very podgy in middle age. By and large the men live longer than the women and it is nothing for both sexes to live well beyond 85.

At age 18 I weighed about 11 stone (70 kg) and by age 35 I had got up to about 12 stone (77 kg). On my 35th birthday I woke up and, coughing, cast around for my cigarettes. For some reason, I was taken with the idea that smoking fags didn't suit me any more. The house stank. I could not even get up and get washed without having a smoke first.

I waited a few weeks until I had to go to bed with a humdinger of a cold. I threw out all tobacco, and when I got going again about a week later, the worst instantaneous craving for a cigarette had passed. I never smoked another cigarette.

The downside was that in about two months my weight went from 12 stone to 16 stone (102 kg) and I looked like a seal. This terrified the life out of me and I tried to figure out how to get rid of the weight. In the middle 1970's there were simply no believable books on weight control for men. Medical professionals simply said "Reduce your calories". How they expected a 36 year old man, who ran round chemical manufacturing plant from dawn to dusk, to suddenly start living on 2000 kCals a day was not explained.

There is nothing more infuriating in this world than a doctor spouting the orthodoxy he has been taught, but has never considered in detail, and doesn't understand anyway. Whoever saw a slim, middle aged doctor in 1975 ? They were all as fat as barrels and smoking pipes.

Acting on a chance hint, what I did was to eat more or less only meat, salad and vitamin C tablets. I carried this on for about five weeks anxiously inspecting myself for signs of incipient scurvy. It cost me a fortune, because I was eating between one and two kg of meat a day. But the weight fell off in a most miraculous fashion. After a while I started following a sort of half way house diet and eventually I got back near to 12 stone.

After this I weighed myself every day and I still do. I calibrate my scales from time to time at a local sporting club.

WHY BE SLIM ?

The stopping smoking episode made me very conscious of my weight but it also made me think why people might want to control their weight.

For me it is very simple in that I start to feel unwell if my weight goes up too much. This is not generally true in the population at large. For some people a big fat belly seems to be a *sine qua non* of living; they don't feel ill at all and I think they never bother about their weight. Still other people fear being overweight because they think it will noticeably shorten their life. Yet others see obesity as bringing on diabetes or other diseases such as arthritis.

If you are a normal man, starting to get tubby, your clothes will cease to fit and you will have to buy new ones. Even if I did not weigh myself I would soon know whether I was in trouble, because I would not be able to get into my 32" jeans.

I take an interest in my blood pressure and measure it very carefully with an Omron 711 machine twice a year. When my weight is up, my blood pressure is higher. When I reduce my weight, my blood pressure goes down. The effect isn't a lot but it is always there.

I deliberately don't try to reduce my weight below 12 st 9 lbs. I found out from experience that the lower my weight the harder it is to maintain it, and if I do go much below the minimum weight people start saying I look gaunt and am I ill ?

LATER TIMES

For a long time I tried to keep my weight to 12 stone. By the time I got to 50 years old, I was getting rather miserable. Either I could not control my weight, or I had to go on protracted meaty diets which I loved but which rather scared me.

I trained as physicist, worked as an industrial chemist, and then, like the rest of the family, as an engineer. I decided that I had to start again and think everything out from the start. I also resolved to keep better records.

The first thing was to decide what weight I ought to be.

If you went to a doctor in 1985 and asked : "What should my weight be ?" he measured your height and then looked up a range of weights on something called a body mass index chart. Certainly in the early 1990's these charts took very little account of age or overall body structure. They really violated common sense, so I just ignored them.

Instead I looked around for people of about my age and structure, and who had not allowed themselves to fall into unnecessary decrepitude. I asked them what they weighed now, and what they weighed in their youth. It wasn't a very scientific survey, but the more people I asked the more people came up with the idea that they weighed about 115% of their youth weight. In my case this meant that I could let myself weigh about 13 stone (83 kg). This was a terrific step forward, because I could keep my weight at 13 stone whereas 12 stone was getting more and more difficult. What's more, as I aged even further I did not start having problems keeping to 13 stone. **I set a band of 12 st 9 lbs to 13 st 4 lbs as my target, my height being about 5' 10" (1.8 m)**

Then I started casting around for reasonable ways to effect weight control.

There was no underlying theory that you could fall back on, except the idea of reducing your calorie intake. Facing a some months period when I knew I would be able to live quietly, I systematically reduced my calorie intake until my weight started to fall. But the result was just terrible. I had to reduce my calorie intake to 1400 kC a day and reduce my alcohol content to zero. Under these conditions I was losing weight quite quickly, more than 1 kg a week.

I would rather get fat and die than live like this.

As a matter of fact nearly all, or actually all, diets were pretty defective. Either they did not work (for me) at all, or they could not be carried out by a man living any sort of working life. They made you too hungry, or you had to eat unpalatable food, or they affected the physiology of the body in some way. I foolishly tried something called the cabbage soup diet. I never liked cabbage much, but I prepared it in the Russian way (they have a soup called shchi) and tried it out for a while. I farted several offices into complete emptiness and was ordered to give it up or have to work in a shed about a mile from the factory. Bloody silly idea.

I gathered all the magazines I could find that had ideas for diets in them. There were one or two diets designed for men but most of the diets were in women's magazines. There was rarely any hint that the writer had any qualifications in nutrition or had done any experimenting

on his or her own account. Still, I tried out various of these diets and some of them worked a bit, but had one or other defect from my own personal point of view.

I paid a lot of attention to an organisation called Weight Watchers because I had a female friend who lost over four stone from a rather slight frame over about 18 months. I tried hard with this, but I couldn't make it work for me. I tend to think that part of Weight Watchers success is that it helps members to get together and talk to each other. As the members seem to be more often women than men, they probably help each other with recipes, egg each other on, and carry out other mutual self help schemes. I would certainly recommend anyone to try Weight Watchers, so long as it is understood that you are going to use it long term as an eating method rather than a short term diet.

I did lose a few kg following their path, but I couldn't quite see my way to building a new eating life on their guidance.

I was still struggling a lot with my weight. Although I could control it, it was difficult. It was made more difficult by the fact that I started making quite long trips abroad, where I had to eat food of which I knew nothing. No idea whether it was calorie rich, full of carbohydrates, mostly meat or whatever. No idea. Also if you go to a banquet in your company's honour, you have jolly well got to eat up and scoff any booze they give you.

You can see from the table below that I was working hard at finding a way of controlling my weight, but that no long term easy-living method had been worked out. It was only after the end of Y2002 that I managed to fully control my weight at 13 stones plus or minus 4 lbs.

Date	St	Lbs
01 Jan 94	15	0
01 April 94	13	7
01 Sept 94	14	0
20 Feb 95	13	0
16 June 95	12	8
28 Nov 95	13	0
17 July 96	14	4
30 Jan 97	15	0
01 Dec 98	15	0
13 Sept 99	14	8
02 Nov 99	14	4
13 Dec 99	13	8

WHAT WEIGHT CONTROL SHOULD BE LIKE

A man faced with increasing weight should be able to go to a physiological engineer and have his physical system analysed. Analyse the body fluids. Measure the size and bulk of the skeleton to give a base line. Refer data to a mechanistic model. Make a tailor made diagnosis. But there is nothing like this available even now.

EMPTY DIETICIANS

Dieticians are a group that cannot be influenced. They preside over one of the worst failures in modern social medicine and still they propound their theories as though they were holy writ. I think of them as having the same mental processes as an ayatollah preaching *jihad*.

Dieticians, during my life time, have pretty well adhered to the holy creed that if one puts more calories into the body than are consumed by the life processes then the body will store the excess as extra weight usually in the form of fat.

Unfortunately, the basic idea has been simplified in simple minds to the non-equivalent idea that "if you eat less you will get thinner". Excluding concentration camp regimes, this simpler idea is not true.

A little thought will soon show that this is a most unlikely premise. If you feed 1000 kilocalories to 100 different individuals you will get 100 different responses. The individual bodies emphasize different digestive processes and different proportions of the in going energy will end up in different places. Some people will store a bit as fat, others will output it as heat. One might imagine extreme cases where the digestive process was working badly that most of the input energy would fall out as undigested waste product. The individual would waste away no matter how many calories were shoved down his throat.

In my view what one must do is to search around for a combination of foods that, processed by your own personal characteristic metabolic profile, causes the least weight retention. What suits one person could be unsuitable for the next.

This is not to say that there are not some general truisms :

For example, in the United Kingdom there is starting to be a youth obesity problem. It is not being tackled in any effective way because we don't know what is causing it. The dieticians tell the Ministry of Health, who tell the government who tell the population that we must eat healthily and keep off junk food. The advice has not had the slightest effect that anyone can see.

Dieticians are fond of talking about "junk" food. I've never been able to find out what this is. I did try to find out because I wanted to be sure I avoided it. Much, in the 1990's, was made of MacDonald's being Junk Food. In my MacDonald's however, I bought stuff made of beef, cheese, bread and potatoes. There was quite a bit of fat, it's true. However, I eat beef, cheese, potatoes, fat and bread in my ordinary daily diet, so I'm blessed if I can see anything junk about MacDonald's offerings.

Eventually I defined "junk food" to myself as anything that you ate far too frequently. Bananas are junk food if you make them 90% of your intake.

NEW IDEAS

Help started to come to hand. I nearly always find that once I've made up my mind to a target, then things start to come to hand. It's because you are looking for them, and in my case, technical down to the bone marrow, I had plenty of chances of running up against a clue.

In 1986 a Frenchman called Michel Montignac published a book, *Dine out and lose weight*, which contained a radical new idea.

What he said was that eating more than a certain amount of carbohydrates for a long period caused damage to the insulin balance in the body. Then it became even less able to process carbohydrate than before and a sort of vicious circle set in.

(Since that time, I may say, most workers in the field either denied that there could be any truth in his ideas, or they declared that they knew this all along. Salauds.)

Now, although this idea rang a bell with me, I hesitated for a long time to fully adopt it. The body is a vastly complicated chemical factory in which streams of chemicals interact with one another to carry out the things like digestion that keep us going. Most of these life processes are not understood. Those that are understood were uncovered bit by bit by biochemists who devoted their whole lives to one part of the problem. Often they would get a Nobel Prize for their work. Anyone who thinks that body processes are simple should look at a chart of the metabolic pathways in the body. These were originally devised by a man called Donald Nicholson and can fascinate or terrify depending on your point of view. (<http://www.iubmb-nicholson.org>)

So, it's no good for an engineer to start expounding on the details of the insulin cycle as though it were a cure all for weight control. Better to sit quietly and try to think out what the

general message might mean in practice and then to try out how some embodiment of the idea might work in practice for yourself.

Also, I began to think that I would get on better if I recorded what I ate, and split it all up into protein, carbohydrates and so on. About this sort of time, personal computers were becoming real and if you couldn't afford one, you could easily hide the data on a company computer.

I'm sure a lot of people will think that it is geeky to the last degree to analyse everything you eat and stick it in a computer. But I was looking for some way to control my weight, I was used to measuring things, and it was no problem in principle to me. In practice, I found it difficult to carry out when I was working. My hours were bizarre and I was often away from home eating unfamiliar food. I only really managed to get the system working reliably after the start of 2008.

Interestingly, Lord Lawson, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, also decided to lower his carbohydrate levels while still eating a decent amount of food. He said he could not be bothered doing sums (A fine thing in a Chancellor!) and he left the whole program to his wife to organise. He gave her a general idea about what he thought he needed to eat and left it to her. (The Nigel Lawson Diet book ISBN 0 7181 4175 Michael Joseph 1996). His system seems to have been spectacularly successful for him and to have worked over a long period.

Further to this, in practice, however much a gourmet you are, you only eat a certain limited number of foods and in about the same proportions, so recording food into a computer is really just ticking boxes. I have a little electronic scales, and if I'm not sure, I do actually weigh things. Press a button and the computer works everything out for you.

I also had one or two things going for me. Apart from a few things like bread and beer, I had never eaten much factory processed food. My parents had made sure that I could cook and even in student days I bought fresh food and prepared it myself. I also did not have a sweet tooth, something I think I inherited from my father. While mother would have two helpings of gateau, father and I would have a second round of roast beef. I can't resist chocolate if it's in sight, but I don't buy it and I insist that my wife keeps quiet about, and hides, any that she buys.

Then a book by Atkins appeared : *Dr Atkins Diet Revolution ISBN 0 09 188 948 0 Vermillion Press 1992*. This book was very much in the Montignac line, and was, in form, one of those American books that drive Europeans barmy. It repeats the simple message ad infinitum seemingly thinking that readers are daft. Still, the message was very clear *"Eat a reasonable amount, but cut out all carbohydrates and alcohol until your weight has fallen enough. After this use more or less carbohydrates as the accelerator and brake on your weight gain"*

This book caused a storm of protest amongst conventional dieticians, but by this time I had learnt enough to see their protestations as being rather light weight.

Like Montignac's ideas, Atkins fixed my attention because it was so like the steak and salad diet I had tried after I stopped smoking cigarettes.

During Y2002 I researched the ideas of both Montignac and Atkins. I tried to understand where the health dangers, if any might lie. I felt that I needed to do this because I wasn't looking for a short term weight fix, but for a long term way of eating.

Then I constructed a diet which I thought might be a bit hard for a few weeks, but might work without being too dangerous. I did see some chances of danger, because I felt instinctively that you should eat a little bit of everything. I also read about some people who, experimenting with the Atkins diet, had suffered all sorts of stomach upsets, bloating, heroic farting, diarrhoea and generally felling unwell.

I stopped eating three meals a day, and ate brunch at 11 am and dinner at about 6 pm. I cut out all alcohol as a temporary measure, and I lowered my total carbohydrate intake to 60 grams/day or less. Also I chose what Montignac had referred to as high glycaemic index foods : Brown bread instead of white and so on. I started dinner with a bowl of salad, and got

my wife to chuck in as many bits and pieces as she could find. The total calories was in the region of 2400 kC/day.

For me, this was just brilliant. I didn't feel hungry, but I lost 1 kg a week for seven weeks and was well under my weight band lower limit. I then started adding things back to the diet, particularly alcohol and potatoes, until I seemed to have everything under control.

Since that time, I have been over 13 st 4 lbs a few times just for very short periods. In these cases, usually after Christmas, it is back to the strict diet until the weight comes off. I find that in practice I can live quite well for five or six months while my weight goes from 12 st 9 lbs to 13 st 4 lbs. Then there has to be a period, usually about five weeks, of relative abstinence. I think I eat normally for 42 out of the 52 weeks in the year and follow a protein rich diet for two periods of five weeks.

Only the most extreme and bizarre diet could harm you over a period of five weeks, so most of the hysterical screams from the conventional dieticians can be crossed out of mind without any qualms.

In 2011 I started looking at the Dukan diet. This is in the same general ballpark as Atkins, but is more closely specified. One important point is that you should not continue the protein-only (Attack Phase) part of the diet for too many days. It should be alternated with protein plus less-starchy vegetables (Cruise Phase). In July 2011 I went 13 days on protein only and lost 6.5 lbs, but then I gradually started to add it again. This might have had some connection with a bug going round the village which was causing upset guts and extreme lassitude. I started another trial from 15 to 24 August and again lost 6.5 lbs. Then I started a few days of a protein plus vegetable and bits diet. After these few days, go back to the protein only diet.

How you arrange the Attack and Cruise phases seems to be something that you have to figure out for yourself.

OTHER DIETS

I should really say "other ways of eating", because "diet" has come to mean "quick fix" in common perception. If you are middle aged and over weight and male, no "diet" will work. You have to change the way you eat for good and you have to find some way to eat that suits your own body.

In 2007 a book was published which removed many of the doubts I had about eating regimes. This was "The Diet Delusion" by Gary Taubes, Publisher Random House ISBN 978 009 189 1411. This wasn't a book about dieting, but was a critique of the schemes for healthy living that had been constructed by (mainly) American dieticians. In the book, Taubes rubbishes many of the dieticians who criticised diets such as Atkins, by simply quoting research papers which don't fit in with their suppositions. I use Taubes' book as source of information now, and I watch for new factors that could be important for weight-controlling eating.

I look for people who have tried out things and written down the results

My way of eating has been to restrict my calorie intake somewhat, and then to control my weight by restricting carbohydrate and alcohol. This won't work for everyone. It wouldn't work for a vegetarian, for example. Actually, my sort of eating scheme wouldn't work for a lot of people that I personally know. They don't like a lot of meat. Some of them do like meat, slaver over it like I do, but simply can't eat it in quantity because it disagrees with them. Fish can sometimes replace meat as the main protein source, but I find it more difficult to come up with strong flavours. My deficient cooking, I admit it.

In 2015 I retrospectively analysed all my data from 2008 onwards. I was fairly sure that the data was quite accurate. What I found was that assuming the calorie intake was more or less constant, say between 1500 and 2000 kC/day, then weight gain per month correlated with the carbohydrate intake. The more CH over about 80 grams/day the more weight I put on.

However, the graph has a lot of scatter and I think there is something else to be taken account of.

Nevertheless, for me, the overall system works. Cut out carbohydrates and my weight falls. Stuff myself with chips and bread and my weight goes up.

SUMMARY OF MY WAY OF EATING WHEN REDUCING WEIGHT

- No longer than six weeks at a time, and no more than 12 weeks in a calendar year.
- Daily kilocalories reduced below 2000. Aim for 1700 depending on what you think your weight ought to be.
- Daily intake of carbohydrates reduced to 60 grams or less. Be extremely strict about this.
- Alcohol reduced to the equivalent of 24 pints of bitter beer per month.
(This is 48 units or, as one unit= 10 ccs of pure alcohol, 480 ccs of pure alcohol per month). Although I personally only do this on rare occasions, cutting out drink altogether makes any weight loss faster.
- No bread at all, no pastry and no cakes. Really, nothing made out of flour.
- Nothing with sugar in it.

SUMMARY OF MY WAY OF EATING WHEN JUST LIVING

- I only eat two meals a day
- Daily kilocalories 2000 or less
- Daily intake of carbohydrates up to 120 grams
- Alcohol I no longer count as I drink sparingly nowadays.
- Bread, I love bread, maybe 150 grams a day. Pastry not much but I will treat myself to a meat pie or a few sausage rolls if I am passing a bakery. Cakes I virtually never eat.

IN GENERAL :

- Don't take any advice as gospel, not even my advice. Everybody's body system works in its own idiosyncratic way. You have to bear in mind what works for other people and then adapt it to fit into your own way of living.
- Keep an open mind. Look around for new possibilities.
- Apply common sense. If you are two metres high and are following my personal system, adjust the quantities. What's good for a giant won't do for a midget.
- Don't ever eat stuff you don't like. Weight reduction is quite hard enough, and there's no need to exaggerate the difficulties.
- Try out things for at least four weeks.
- Keep some sort of record.

CONCLUSION

There is much to be learned about weight-controlling eating. I suspect that, for a while at least, that advances will be made by people who were not trained as dieticians.

Fortunately, with the appearance of the net, groups of self protecting, self satisfied academics can no longer prevent publication and the dissemination of new work.

A FEW NOTES

(1) I have recently read a book "*Man vs Fat: The weight loss manual*" Andrew Shanahan. A man after my own heart who has a similar message : Experiment and make up your own mind.

(2) I mentioned a book "*The Diet Delusion*" by Gary Taubes. I have read this book several times, for the sheer interest of some of his asides. As an Englishman brought up after the Second World War, it was explained to me that the Scot James Lind demonstrated that scurvy in sailors could largely be prevented by adding lime juice the diet. I believed this simplicity for most of my life. Taubes points out in his chapter "*Reducing diets*" that matters are much more complicated, that a man can live on a largely meat diet for long periods without ever getting scurvy and that the conditions for getting scurvy are rather more intricate than I had been led to believe.

(3) The correlation from Jan 2008 to April 2015 is shown on the next page.

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