

FEAST OR FAMINE

YOUR BODY'S RESPONSE TO DIETING.

- Humans have a physiological ability to adapt their metabolism to low calorie diets. This adaptation functions to reduce the calories needed for survival during times of famine (poor food quality and quantity). The body reduces the amount of calories needed to function, conserving its fat stores to survive the famine. Each time there is a famine, less and less fat will be lost as the body improves its ability to conserve the fat. With every feast, the body increases its ability to store fat and the amount of fat stored is increased. This adaptation occurs much easier and faster in women than it does men.
- This metabolic adaptation is also started with low calorie diets, usually under 1200 calories. The diet starts a famine, once you go off the diet and increase your intake (the feast doesn't have to be much of an increase), weight gain begins. Each time you go back on a low calorie diet and then off, you lose and gain fat. Each time you lose less weight and gain more fat as your body gets better at adapting. This cycle is also called **YOYO DIETING** and it will continue until it is stopped.
- Once you are in a Feast and Famine Cycle, there is only one way out and that is by **EATING MORE**. This raises your metabolism to a normal level for your age and activity. You will most likely gain fat, but once your metabolism is at a normal level you can start a reasonable food plan that allows a slow weight loss when coupled with exercise/activity.

STEPS TO STOPPING THE FEAST OR FAMINE CYCLE

- Eat more – Eat at least the minimum recommended servings of the USDA Eating Guidelines. Start by adding foods little by little if you haven't been eating very much for some time.
 - *Eat at least 40-50 grams of fat each day. Fat can be consumed as part of the foods listed above, or as added fat to those foods, such as margarine, butter, salad dressing, etc...Check the food's label to see how many grams of fat are in the amount of food you are eating.
 - *Eat some fat at each meal – at least 10-12 grams. Fat is the nutrient that tells your brain you are full. Your body is programmed to keep being hungry until you eat fat.
 - *Some people need to follow a different food plan that allows them to work on emotional issues concerning their body and food consumption. Non-Diet Approach and Demand Feeding food plans allow people with food issues to directly address their emotional needs. For more information on these types of food plans, contact Gale Welter, MS, RD, CSSD, CSCS in the Nutrition Office at Campus Health Service (621-4550).
 - *You will probably gain some fat and some muscle, as well as some edema (fluid under the skin) in this step. This weight gain is not permanent. You always end a Feast or Famine Cycle with a Feast, it is not permanent weight gain and you will lose this weight.
- Once your weight gain has stopped, your weight will stabilize. Step one may last a couple of weeks or months until your body recognizes that the Feast or Famine Cycle has stopped and will not start again. At this time, you will need to reduce your daily calorie intake by *only* **200-300 calories**, while increasing your

activity by *only* **200-300 calories**. This is a safe calorie reduction and will not trigger your body to adapt its metabolism. This will result in a slow and permanent weight loss of .5 to 1 pound of fat each week. This weight loss may not be noticeable for several months.

- The concept of stopping the Feast and Famine Cycle and gaining weight is difficult and painful to accept for many people. The long term result, however, is that by the end of 6 months there will be some weight loss and by the end of a year, you most likely will have permanently lost 20 pounds. These pounds will not come back unless you start another famine. Your body will slow down its weight loss as you approach your appropriate weight.
- If you have more than 20-30 pounds to lose, it is possible you will lose only 20-30 pounds and then plateau – sometimes even for 6-9 months before you start losing weight again. This is your body's natural response to making sure that another famine won't be coming.

REMEMBER – these are only estimates. Your individual metabolism may be different.

Written by Lynne Smiley, PhD

For further information:
Gale S. Welter, MS, RD, CSSD, CSCS
Nutrition Counselor, Campus Health Service
welter@email.arizona.edu
(520) 621 – 4550

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