



Fighting fit but still fat?

Many of us exercise like mad but weight stubbornly clings to our bodies. **Fiona Barber** asks our new columnist, registered dietitian MaryRose Spence, why pounding the pavement doesn't always lead to pounds lost and how the frustrated fit among us can shed excess kilos.

IT CAME AS A BOLT from the blue – but it also explained why the hours spent swimming laps in the pool and pounding the footpath hadn't made an ounce of difference to my weight.

The message that registered dietitian MaryRose Spence was giving me was that all the exercising I was doing was simply making me hungry – really hungry – but not helping to shift the 5kg I needed to lose. That's because although I was overweight, I also had a slightly higher than average muscle mass. Those muscles needed feeding – but with the right foods and, more importantly, the right foods for me.

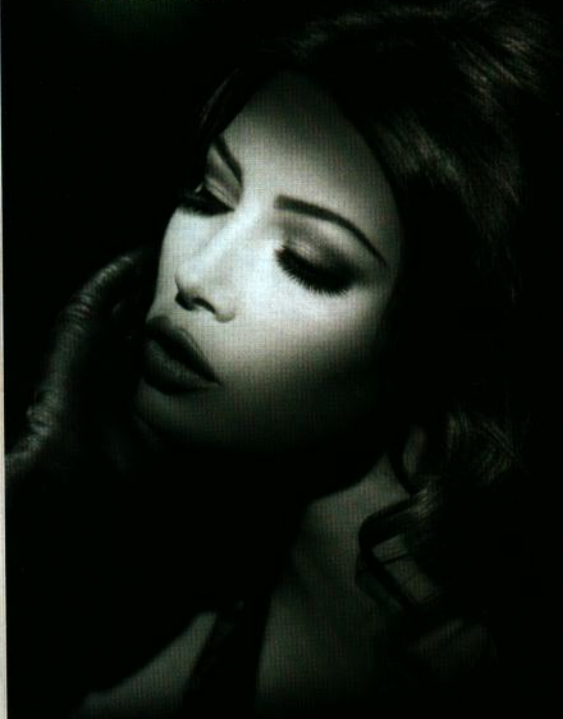
I'd been busy putting away the sort of tucker I thought was good for me but was, in fact, failing to stave off my hunger pangs. My muscles and I (I loved that part of the diagnosis; wasn't so enamoured with the overweight bit) needed longer-lasting protein. The muesli for breakfast and half a scone at morning tea were sugary short-term carbohydrate fixes that were never going to keep me feeling full until lunchtime. I needed more protein. I also needed more green veges to spin

out the “feeling full” effects of the protein I should be eating at lunch and dinner. And in the short-term, I needed to cut back on the exercise to curb my hunger. Now I knew what to do for *my* body and it all made perfect sense.

The message here – and in her new weight-loss book *Size Does Matter: How to Eat, Drink and Lose Weight ... Forever* – is that when it comes to losing kilos, no one size fits all. Body composition – the ratio of muscle to fat – needs tailored treatment and you won't get that with a generic eating plan. What worked for someone with my body composition wouldn't be suitable for someone who, for example, had less muscle and even more fat. “Knowing how to link food with your body makeup is the only way forward to long-term weight control.”

Another crucial message is that we need to understand food and what it does. “It's a bit like understanding the difference between shampoo, soap and toothpaste, MaryRose says. “They all clean the body but are used in different ways. You don't have to think about which cleaner to use on your teeth.” And so it should be with food. ▶

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“You’ll soon become just as familiar with carbohydrates, proteins and fats when making suitable food choices.” And, as the title of MaryRose’s new weight loss book advocates, size does indeed matter – the size of your portions, your appetite and of course your muscle and fat proportions. The starting point is to find out about your body, as I did. How do you do that? MaryRose has a whizz-bang device called a Body Composition Analyser that gauges a person’s fat and muscle proportions. And this, she says, has transformed the way she practises and how she approaches weight loss with her clients. (Some dietitians, nutritionists, health

relative kilojoule values of various foods (Did you know, 12 rice crackers, eight dried apricots, a tablespoon of honey and one Toffee Pop all have a similar value?) as well as 50 favourite “the more you eat the better” recipes.

In her *Stepping Out* chapter MaryRose puts the spotlight on exercise and explains why all my hours jogging and swimming were not helping me lose weight. “With the technology to measure body makeup, you can see for yourself that when you carry extra body fat, increasing your exercise can make very little difference to the numbers. If you have high body fat along with a high level of muscle, exercise for longer than 35 minutes may

A WELL-MUSCLED PERSON WILL FEEL HUNGRIER SOONER AFTER EATING THAN SOMEONE WITH LESS MUSCLE.

practitioners and fitness centres use these monitors. You can also buy more basic versions from some pharmacies or from MaryRose www.weightwise.co.nz). Once you understand your body composition you can then apply the information contained in the pages of her book. This includes the lowdown on “The big three” – food, fluid and exercise – and how to balance them.

No food is off-limits. She doesn’t want deprivation or obsessive calorie counting, rather, “You need to know how to choose our food at meal times, otherwise a well-muscled person will feel hungrier sooner after eating than someone with less muscle. It is not uncommon to have a high muscle mass and high body fat, and if you’re in this situation you’ll have a wonderful body makeup once you’ve reduced your body fat.

“Fat tissue, on the other hand, uses very little energy, and people who felt they ‘only have to smell food to gain weight’ will often have a low muscle mass and high body fat. If you are in this category you will need to be particular about portions. Once you have reduced your body fat, you could work on increasing your muscle mass to increase your metabolic rate (the rate your body uses energy).” Alongside this information are pages showing the

just make you a hungrier person over the following 24 hours. The balance for weight loss is certainly tilted to what you eat, rather than how much you exercise.” This in no way minimises the importance of exercise – MaryRose is an advocate of brisk walking – it just puts it into perspective when it comes to body composition and weight loss.

Size Does Matter was borne out of hours spent pondering why some people lose weight easily, while others struggle with hunger. It was also written to dispel food myths and cut a pathway through the jargon. What is marketed as a “good for you” may be high in kilojoules and make losing weight a struggle.

“This information will change the way you think about your body and your food choices and move you from fixations on diets and exercise.” ■
MaryRose’s weight loss and nutrition column starts next month. You can visit her website, www.weightwise.co.nz.

Size Does Matter:
 How to Eat, Drink
 and Lose Weight ...
 Forever by MaryRose
 Spence, RRP
 \$39.99, is available
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