

JOHN MAYTHAM'S BANTING

journey

The controversial *Cape Talk* radio personality talks to us about his recent weight loss and shares his thoughts about the debate around the low-carb, high-fat diet.

Have you always struggled with weight?

Only as I got older. On my 40th birthday, I was 67kg. I weighed nothing. I could eat and drink whatever I liked... Then some sort of significant metabolic change kicked in, and the weight crept on.

About four years ago – I'm 58 now – my wife and I were on holiday in Madagascar, and I was having a hard time cutting my toenails with my belly in the way – it was just incredibly uncomfortable. And I thought, 'Something has got to change.' I weighed myself when I got back, and I was 102kg.



inspiration

BY: ROBYN MACLARTY

So in 15 years I'd put on 35kg. Up until then, I'd just gotten used to my steadily expanding waistline. Every now and then I'd try to not eat things for a while. But the only thing that worked was the traditional diet I went on, which included trips to the Sports Science Institute, and had me doing things Tim Noakes would once have encouraged me to do.

It was a well-structured programme, the exercise is tailored to your ability, you're measured before you start, you're pushed in terms of fitness and general wellbeing and given lots of dietary advice. And it worked well, while I was on it. I got down to 75kg.

But when I wasn't on it, I would head to the office vending machine and eat NikNaks and wine gums – the weight crept back on steadily.

What finally made you decide to try Banting?

I'd met Tim Noakes in the past – before he lost all the weight. And then I saw him at the launch of his book *The Real Meal Revolution* in Kalk Bay, which I hosted, and I saw in three dimensions how much weight he'd lost. Up until then, I hadn't exactly been a sceptic, but I hadn't bought into the diet, either.

We had a really tasty meal based entirely on Banting principles, including cheesecake with xylitol instead of sugar. I thought, what the hell. I'll give it a try. That was around 10 December last year.

Do you exercise much?

I do *now*. On one of my previous checkups my GP told me I had elevated cholesterol, my sugar levels were becoming dangerous, and my doctor wanted to put me on statins. I just said, 'No.' I really don't want to get into that.

And my wife had read in *FAIRLADY* that walking for 30 minutes every day is the single best thing you can do for your longevity. And I did it for a while,

but then I got lazy. Less motivated. And I just felt terrible, which turns into a vicious cycle. The more terrible you feel, the less motivated you are to do anything to make you feel not so terrible. So I thought, 'I feel terrible, what does it matter?' And you comfort eat... It's the same old story.

Historically I've had a pattern of doing nothing for several years, and getting disgusted with myself, and then starting too quickly and becoming injured. But once I decided to follow this way of eating, I also decided to increase the intensity of my exercise, but to do so very slowly. So I do a brisk 30-minute walk on Mondays; then Tuesdays to Saturdays I do 50 minutes, half of which is running and half brisk walking.

Next month I'll up it to slightly more running than walking, and slightly more running the following month and so on. On Sundays I do an hour and a half and I love it. I look forward to it. I am working up to the Peninsula Marathon later this year.

Do you miss carbs?

Not really. And I have a fairly significant sweet tooth. I used to be able to polish off an entire bar of milk chocolate, but now I just have one or two blocks of 70% dark chocolate. I eat very little. In fact, this is the thing I couldn't really wrap my head around when Tim and I spoke, at functions as well as privately. I couldn't believe how little I could get away with eating. I'm just not hungry any more.

What does a typical day's meals look like for you?

My breakfast is fairly consistent: I have some berries with full-cream yoghurt and a boiled egg, sometimes mushrooms. And then I'm not hungry for the rest of the day. At lunchtime I have to force myself to eat. I'll have a matchbox-sized piece of cheese, a handful of cherry tomatoes, perhaps half a chicken breast, or a handful of springbok biltong, something like that. For supper tonight I'm having a small piece of seared tuna with a salad.

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Before, my wife and I would have chops, baked potato and vegetables for supper, and I'd find myself sneaking a third chop onto my plate. Now I just have one chop, and it's enough. And I don't even eat all the fat on it.

How soon did you start losing weight?

Within the first few weeks. I can't tell you how much weight I've lost, because I'm determined never to weigh myself again. I don't care what the scale says, it's got to be about how I feel.

Whether it's more or less than I've lost on previous regimes, I don't know. But it's substantial.

Do you think people are too fanatical about the diet?

The world is getting obese. Whether we are overweight or not, we all know people who are. Along with being overweight comes a sense of listlessness, of low mood, aggression, a whole lot of significantly negative psychological factors – and my experience is that I'm a considerably nicer person while Banting: a better colleague, a better husband, a better father, a better friend. I just enjoy my life a lot better than I did before. I have more energy. I'm not constantly fighting fatigue. I stopped snoring, I don't fart and burp as much any more. I used to do that a lot, and now I almost never do. I sleep better.

Another advantage to Banting is that I recover from hangovers much more quickly. So I can have dinner with friends, drink way too



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much, and then wake up the next morning at half past six and feel like a run.

Have you gone on record that you're Banting?

Yes. What tends to happen is I'll have a conversation with Tim, or share someone's experience of Banting on air, and then I get bombarded with negative emails from professors of medicine and specialists and GPs who accuse me of being a proselytiser for a dangerous, faddish and unproven way of living. And I say to them, 'Phone me on air; here is my number.' But they never do.

Do you think Banting could be dangerous?

I'm not a scientist, and very few of us have the empirical, experiential, academic tools to take on the science. There's just this constant flood of studies that purportedly prove A or B. Both sides of the debate are armed with this evidence, and how the hell am I supposed to figure it out? I'm not *entirely* convinced it's perfectly healthy – I can't be because I don't know the science.

I can't entirely free myself from the worry that I might be doing long-term damage to my health. I can't work out – and it's too early for anybody to be able to work out definitively – whether we've got a fad that is being bought into because the time was right and because the man leading the fad has a great deal of scientific credibility and is incredibly articulate in spreading the message; or whether it is a true paradigm shift. Are we seeing the end of a decades-long approach to nutrition that is wrong? I don't know.

Have you urged your friends to try Banting?

No. If anyone asks me about my experience, I will very happily share it. But I will not go out and proselytise. It's not a diet for everybody but it works for me. And I would rather live for the next 15 years feeling the way I do now, than live the next 25 years feeling the way I did before.

And your plan is to stick to it forever and ever amen?

Ja.