

## **Do Men Have It Easier?**

**By Lisa Schilling RN**

When it comes to fitness and weight loss, men and women are different in more ways than the obvious. There is a basic equation for the balance of energy. It shows that Energy In (calories), minus Energy Out (Metabolism and Activity), equal Body Weight. The following are six physiological ways that women differ from men in the perspective of energy balance.

Women must monitor food intake much more closely than men because they do not burn as much of it through metabolism and activity. One reason is size. On the average, men are larger than women. The larger you are, the more calories your body burns at rest and during activity. This is due to moving a greater mass through space.

Secondly, a women's natural body composition has a greater fat percentage and less lean muscle than men. This is due to the reproductive organs and the essential fat needed for child bearing. Men require only 3 percent essential body fat, whereas women require a whopping 12 percent.

Thirdly, women possess only a fraction of the testosterone of men. Testosterone enhances the building of lean muscle mass. This leads to men having 20 to 30 times the muscle-building potential of women. The more muscle mass you possess the greater rate of calorie burn you will have. One pound of muscle burns between 35 and 50 calories per pound, per day. So just one pound of muscle can help you burn 5.2 pounds in a year. Five pounds of muscle would burn 26 pounds. This is why building muscle is vital to both men and women. What we find is that men have an easier time doing this because of their natural fat to muscle ratio.

A study by the University of Maryland showed that by adding muscle mass through strength and resistance training, you could raise your metabolic rate by about seven percent, while there are

other studies showing as much as fifteen percent. The calories are used to break down the muscle tissue and repair them from the stress of resistance training. This is an example of how strength training can increase weight loss and metabolism. Adding lean muscle will enable you to lose 10 to 30 plus pounds annually.

Fourth, is bone loss or osteoporosis. This occurs as both men and women age. The problems come due the fact that women start their lives with less bone mass than men, causing a greater percentage of loss. Excessive dieting and calcium deficiencies simply add to this problem. Age related bone loss is accelerated for women during the first five to seven years after menopause. During this time they can lose as much as 20 percent of their bone mass. Weight-bearing exercise can stop and often reverse this age related bone loss.

Fifth, is menopause, a time of vast hormonal changes for women. It also causes an accelerated loss of lean muscle tissue. The average person, man or woman, will lose between one-half and seven-tenths of a pound of muscle yearly. But as women approach menopause, that amount of muscle loss almost doubles! This will account for a large drop in metabolism and daily calorie burning. As estrogen diminishes, women will also experience a compositional shift to weight storage around the abdominal area.

Sixth, women must deal with hormonal fluctuations during her monthly cycle, through childbearing years and during menopause. Issues such as bloating, cravings, emotional instability, low energy, irritability, and sleep issues can lead to bouts of depression and feelings of anxiety. These serious problems can cause a greater release of cortisol, a stress hormone, which can trigger fat storage. This instability of hormones makes weight loss and motivation for exercise more difficult.

Although this sounds very disheartening, do not despair. There is

hope! Weight training can help women tip the scales back in their favor. By starting a program of progressive weight training you can halt and often reverse these negative side effects of aging. If you are not sure where to start you can seek help from books, videos or knowledgeable people. The Ketcham Community Center has hired me to help members develop such programs. Stop in and see what increasing your muscle mass can do for you.