

## Mars and Venus on the scales

*When it comes to weight, there's definitely a gender gap; men worry about lean muscle and having a tapered physique while women tend to be concerned about a number on a scale. These days, the weight-loss industry is responding to this reality*

By Ellen Ashton-Haiste

Men and women are different.

Well, you might say, that's obvious! Certainly it is, on the surface. But those differences also exist on deeper and less recognizable emotional and psychological levels – as laid out in John Gray's 1992 bestseller *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*.

Such is the case in the realm of weight-loss, today taking on an ever-higher profile as the medical community decries an escalating epidemic of obesity. Seniors know all about it – the first thing their doctor says, viewing the post-middle-age spread and contemplating high blood pressure, high cholesterol or shortness of breath is: lose some weight!

“For men, weight loss doesn't mean a low weight on a scale. It means lean muscle mass. They want to be muscular and have a certain physique. Whereas for women, it's the number on a scale or body image,” says Dr. Madhulika Gupta, a London, Ont. psychiatrist who works with clients struggling with weight and particularly with eating disorders (10 times more common in women, she notes).

“Men don't worry about their self-worth, when it comes to weight, nearly as much as women,” says Susan Taylor, 58, a Kitchener, Ont. entrepreneur.

“Guys feel that they have an obligation to grow up and become a man, which means to support a family, to get out there and slay the dragon even at the expense of their own health,” which can lead to not looking after important issues like weight, maintains Harvey Brooker, founder of a Toronto weight-loss program and support group. “I don't think women are given those same messages.”

Taylor and Brooker are in a good position to evaluate the differences between the sexes. She has invented a unique weight scale that is resonating with women much more than men. He claims his support network is the only one in North America targeted exclusively at males.

### **Hers: Only the scale knows...**

Taylor's product, known as the Quantum Scale, is unique in that it does not show a weight, but rather only the amount lost or gained, calculated to a 10th of a pound.

While the scale, launched in December 2008, has buyers of both sexes, "men definitely don't get it as readily as women," Taylor acknowledges, chuckling that when she's out touting her invention, men are most enthusiastic about "buying it for their wives or girlfriends."

In fact, it was a conversation with her son William that planted the seeds of the idea. Taylor was on a diet and losing. William urged her to get on the scale. "I said 'you just don't understand; all I want to know is how much I've lost; I really don't want to see how much I weigh!'," Taylor says. "That was the Eureka moment."

As Taylor explains her "Quantum theory," which gives the product its name, "What you see directly affects how you feel. So when you look at a positive – you see, for example, you've lost even a quarter pound – you feel good. You want to continue feeling that way and it motivates you to keep going." Conversely, if the scale shows a small gain, it's motivation to take action.

"But when you're looking at the weight that isn't where you want to be, it tends to overwhelm, women especially, because they're not living up to what society has told them they should be."

The number is often overwhelming for women, agrees psychiatrist Gupta. "Many times, people won't step on a scale because they are scared to see the number and, as a result, that may prevent them from monitoring ... even if they really need to lose weight."

The Quantum Scale is now available online, at \$59 each, at [quantumscale.com](http://quantumscale.com).

### **His: It's a guy thing....**

At 10 a.m. every Sunday, some 150-plus men gather in a second-storey room at a Toronto strip mall to talk about something seldom discussed in locker rooms or Rotary meetings: how to get thinner and stay that way.

Brooker, their leader, gives motivational talks on weight and healthy lifestyles and opens up a discussion on all sorts of related issues pertinent to men – prostate problems, male sexuality, all things they would be uncomfortable discussing in mixed company. Brooker, who started by losing 50 pounds that he's kept off for almost 40 years, worked briefly with Weight Watchers and ran a franchise for a diet organization with his wife, Helen, for 14 years. But he noticed those groups attracted very few men. By and large they were for women and led by women.

Syd Seltzer, one of Brooker's clients, has been attending Brooker's program since 2008 and dropped from 275 to 200 lbs. "I want to go down another five and that'll do because I don't want to end up looking like a gaunt skeleton," says the 81-year-old.

In this group, he finds "a certain camaraderie that I don't think you'll find anywhere else. I have not found that in any other weight-loss program and I've been in three or four different ones."

Brooker provides his clients – he also does one-on-one counselling and by phone with men outside Toronto – with a list of food choices and amounts. "We basically go by Canada's Food Guide. And there are plenty of choices. Some like cottage cheese; some don't. Some will eat fish; some won't. It's not a one-size-fits-all thing."

It's also not a diet, he says. Diets are things that people eventually go off. This is permanent lifestyle change.

"It's not just how much you eat but what you eat," says Seltzer. "I eat lots of fish, chicken, lots of salad and lots of cooked vegetables. The computer is a marvellous thing. I've got dozens of beautiful recipes." And no one is starving, he adds; 1800 to 2000 calories a day are allowed.

Look for Brooker's book *It's Different For Men* or check out this month's issue of *Walrus* magazine where author Robert Fulford, has written about the support group.

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