

The Traveler's Diet

By Bill L.

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Since I was 28, my public relations career has required that I travel, entertain and live on the road. It was around that early age that I began to burst out of my college-sized clothes and began to put on weight. While traveling, life revolved around breakfast, lunch and dinner — with drinks on top of that. I had no regard for calories and didn't care about what I ordered. Meals were usually paid for by others at top restaurants from Tokyo to New York to London. In between meals, it was hotel room service and airport food courts. It's no wonder I ended up fat. Fast forward 14 years and I tipped the scales at over 275 pounds, had high cholesterol and found I had to buy cloths with XXL (and considered XXXL sizes). Finally, I had enough. After watching a friend lose more than 30 pounds at Monarch Medical Weight Loss Center, I signed up with the best of intentions.

To me, Monarch had to solve two problems, how to eat at airports and how to handle entertaining clients around meals. On top of that, I was a constant nibbler while working from my home office. Mind you, I nibbled ice cream, chips and whatever else filled the belly. I was pretty much a mess.

I started at Monarch in March of 2009, and it's really changed my life. The diet prescription solved the problem of how to travel and eat without gaining weight.

Here's how:

Scenario Pre-Monarch: Wake up at 4 a.m. and get to airport by 5 a.m. Get coffee and a doughnut. Get on plane, have more coffee and airline food or snack. Get off plane, grab breakfast at McDonald's (sausage McMuffin with cheese), then head out to lunch at my destination. Get a burger, fries and a coke. Early afternoon, more coffee and candy bar to hold over to late dinner. Dinner was a steak (with hollandaise sauce), side dishes, dessert

and three to four glasses of wine, a scotch and then more coffee. Repeat for three days.
Gain: 4 pounds in a seven-day period.

Scenario Post-Monarch: Wake up at 4 a.m. and drink a Weight and Inches shake by 5 a.m. (make them the night before and drink it super chilled). Get to airport and walk past the food counter and go to coffee bar and have an herbal decaf tea. (Yes, I gave up caffeine when I started Monarch.) Get on the plane and have a protein bar ready to eat by 8:30 a.m. Get off the plane, drink 20 oz. of water and around 11 a.m. have a beef stick and protein cookie. Postpone lunch until 1:30 p.m. and have a small salad with veggies, low-cal dressing on the side and more water with lunch. Around 4 p.m. have another protein bar. Dinner, chicken or seafood, broccoli and skip the alcohol. (Yep, I gave up drinking same day I gave up coffee). Before bed, have another Weight and Inches shake. Get up and work out for 30 minutes. Repeat 3 days. Lose three and a half pounds in a seven-day period.

During my two-plus months on my Monarch program, I have flown out of town nearly every week. Three days minimum. To date, I have lost more than 28 pounds ... toward my goal of losing 72. It's funny, but the prescription diet actually makes travelling easier.

Here is some advice for everyone facing the same predicament:

1. It took about a month, but I brought my calories down from 1,650 to 1,350 and still felt great. I started by splitting my evening and morning shake. I just added more water and only drank half at night. That was 100 calories. Then, I cut down the amount of carbs with dinner. Sometimes it was brown rice or a piece of wheat bread. I cut those to a half portion. I cut back some of my snacks from 170 calories to 150 calories. While traveling, this cutting down will help manage the hidden calories in restaurant food. Even if they sneak you a few extra, you still don't exceed your goal calorie count on any given day.
2. Use gallon-sized Ziplock bags to pack your food for each day. Label them by day and pack them in your bag. I had no problems at airport security with this. Bring an extra

half day, just in case you are delayed. At the beginning of each day, pull out the corresponding bag and take five minutes to plan out your meals in conjunction with your day's events. Adjust accordingly so you don't give yourself an excuse to sway off the track just because you are not home. This is critical.

3. Buy this book, The CalorieKing's "Calorie, Fat & Carbohydrate Counter." Put it in your luggage with your food. Read it in your spare time. It will gross you out when you realize what your pre-Monarch intake was. If you know what restaurant you are eating at in advance, see if their menu is online and compare the menu to the guidelines in the book. The book also showcases about 200 fast food restaurants if that comes up. Plan accordingly.
4. Take a long time with your menu at a restaurant and don't be afraid to speak up. I start with finding the protein, generally lower-calorie meats or fish, and then focus on the carb. I then look at it for the "extras" which is generally where the calories are. Often times, I only order an appetizer, like a crab cocktail (with lemon only.) No sauces, no breads, and definitely no desserts. Your guests will look at you funny, but once you explain the restaurant could kill your weight loss progress, they get it and go about their meal.
5. Give up coffee (Starbucks), soda, sports drinks and alcohol. Only drink water or water with a lemon or decaf herbal tea. First, you will sleep better and second, you cannot succeed with them. Only recently did I add back an occasional cup of half-caffeinated coffee and even more rare, my coveted vodka martini. But I'm talking once every few weeks and never more than once in a given week. Keep in mind, coffee withdrawal is something that takes time. I dropped a quarter cup every two days, and it took a full three weeks to withdraw. By comparison, not drinking alcohol was a piece of cake. By removing these calorie-rich fluids, you force yourself to drink more water, especially when travelling and you find that you are fresher and more energetic while away from home.
6. Finally, at catered functions such as a fundraiser or reception, always have an extra snack nearby so that you can avoid any temptation when high-calorie finger food platters are brought around by waiters. Have a sparkling water in one hand and just say no. Then sneak out and eat a beef stick, then come back in. After about 20

attempts at giving you an 800-calorie fried shrimp, they will leave you alone and you will be thinner for it.

One weird byproduct of all this change is that when you take the cost of eating out, the expense of alcohol, soda and Starbucks, along with the price of junk food, you will find that your prescription foods are cheaper than what you normally spend. This is especially true if you are travelling. Airports, restaurants and hotels gouge you for the smallest things. Don't give them the satisfaction of ruining your diet and your wallet at the same time.

I leave you with this: Losing weight while travelling can be easy. Follow your prescription, exercise and plan ahead.