

Meal Planning

Valor Voices Podcast Transcript



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Here's your host.

John Bouthillette: Hi, I'm John Bouthillette, a lead instructor with the VALOR Program and host for this edition of VALOR Voices podcast. I'm joined today by Lieutenant Brandon Post, with the Provo, Utah, Police Department. Brandon is also a member of the VALOR instructional team and is a subject expert on the topic of physical wellness.

Brandon is a certified physical fitness specialist and a member of the Provo Police Fitness Committee and has taught on the topic of fitness, health, and wellness for 15 years.

How are you doing, Brandon?

Brandon Post: I'm doing good. How you doing, John?

John: Great, great. Brandon, I wanted to get you to talk to us today about the concept of diet, but specifically as it relates to the process of planning your meals.

Let's kind of talk about diet real quick and why it's so important to us in law enforcement.

Brandon: Okay. The interesting thing is that there's been some data that's come out recently that's shown we're actively becoming more active, but despite the increased activity levels, we're still becoming more obese than we used to be, which shows that diet is really . . . I mean, there's a couple of sayings. Runners say you can't outrun a bad diet. Gym rats say you can't outwork a bad diet. Diet is critically important for maintaining a healthy weight and healthy lifestyle.

John: You know what the interesting thing is, Brandon, I go back to my days on midnight shift. The options of what I have to eat are limited during 0-dark-30. There's nothing but—usually is going to be—high-fat, high-calorie, cheeseburger, eggs, and bacon, and so I wonder, how do we get over that? So if I'm an officer out there who's looking to eat better, how do I get past the diet options that I have in the field?

Brandon: And I've worked a lot of graves. Same thing, there just are not good options on graveyard or midnight shift, or however you want to refer to it, but the solution for me, and that has been able to work with some of the guys we work with, what we've been able to do: meal planning. I think . . . now, when we say meal planning, there's always groans like, "Oh, I've got to do a ton of cooking and planning and it's all this work." I have found over the years that meal planning saves so much time, because you can do it all in one day, and you're not, every single day, trying to figure out what you're going to cook or going through this whole rigamarole in the kitchen every single day. It's a once-a-week process, preparing all your lunches for work. It saved me a ton of time and helps ensure that I can eat healthy while I'm out there and not go with some of these unhealthier, negative options.

John: So it's planning ahead of time, doing bulk cooking, and then setting up your meals for whatever your shift work's going to look like. Is that what we're talking about?

Brandon: Right.

John: So there's really no need to cook every single day before I go to work?

Brandon: I think it saves a ton of time. So just to kind of walk you through the process that I've found that works best for me . . . I mean, this isn't the only, or maybe not even the best, solution, but it really has worked for me and a bunch of the guys that I work with. On one day a week, set it aside and I'll do this with my wife. We'll cook just a bunch of food. And oh, there's several new kinds of pressure cooker out there that save so much time. It used to be that when I was doing the chicken, I'd have to load the plate up with all these frozen chicken breasts, put them in the microwave, have to get it out, turn the chicken, move it all around as I continue to try and defrost the chicken. Then you got to make your sauce and you got to marinate it for several days, and then you got to cook it.

Well now, you take these new pressure cookers and I'll throw in all these frozen chicken breasts . . . I mean, I'll throw, 10, 11, 12 breasts in this thing. And it's literally a two-ingredient recipe. I'll grab a can of salsa, open the can of salsa and pour it in with the chicken.

John: Wow.

Brandon: Put the lid on, and set it for 15 minutes. And these are frozen-solid breasts. You don't have to . . . 15 minutes. Because they're frozen, it takes a little bit of time to get up to pressure, 20 minutes or so. But once it's at pressure, 15 minutes, you're done and it is tender, delicious. I will never defrost or marinate chicken again for the rest of my life.

John: Well first, you're making me hungry. Let's get that out of the way. And second, what we're trying to say and what you're trying to say is that there is not a lot of effort that needs to be put in this. There had to be some effort, of course, but it's not as big of a process as people think it is, that, "Oh my God, I got to set aside an hour before every shift to cook my meal."

Brandon: Yeah, not at all.

John: Yeah. So you were talking about the fact that you can do this a lot quicker. And then so we start prepping our meals, we get an idea in our head what we want to eat in our shift, and of course, you talked about chicken, which is one of my personal favorites when I was going heavy into the diet and the exercise.

So how do we incorporate that whole process of meal planning into your weight-loss plan?

Brandon: So once you've got . . . you just create a standard. So along with the chicken, you're doing rice in a rice cooker, you're boiling a bunch of vegetables and then just weighing them out. You have . . . in advance, you purchase several different kinds of bowls, containers, whatever makes it easiest for you. You weigh them out, and you separate them into the bowls. You're eating a consistent amount each time. A simple food scale helps you do that. But you weigh them in the individual bowls and stick them in the freezer, and they are frozen and ready to go. So when it's time to go on shift, I grab a sack and throw the frozen meal into the sack, and then my lunch is ready to go.

John: That sounds like a really good idea. I remember back in the days when I was doing narcotics investigations, I always had a meal on the go in the same way, so I know it works for me as well. But you know what? The thing I always get is that everybody has a different metabolism. Correct?

Brandon: Correct.

John: So how do I determine where my metabolism needs to be?

Brandon: This is the fun stuff. This is where the plan of attack, where it comes together and you can start really seeing some positive results, but Step One is to try and determine where your metabolism is currently set at. We are all different, we are all unique, we're all going to have a unique setup metabolism. And that can be . . . your body type, your gender, there's so many . . . height, weight, age. So many things determine metabolism. So the easiest way to do that . . . there's

several online calculators, and if you don't want to go through this process, you can use an online calculator; it just won't be as accurate. But ideally, what you're going to do is get an app on your phone, and there are lots of different apps. Some are paid, some are free. Most of them are really good, and pretty much all of them do what's needed. But you're just going to track all your calories for five to seven days. If you eat something, you log in. And the critical part of this is, you do not adjust behavior. We want a . . . if you're currently not gaining weight and you're not losing weight, you're just basically maintaining, then whatever your current habits are, what you're eating right now is pretty much . . . that's where your metabolism's set at.

So we want to know where that metabolism's set at. The problem is, is when people start tracking, let's say they would've eaten this donut, and now they realize, "Oh my goodness, this donut is 600 calories," or whatever.

John: So they skew the numbers, is what you're trying to say?

Brandon: Yeah, exactly. They don't eat the donut because tracking incentivizes them not to eat the donut. Well, if you would've eaten the donut before, eat the donut now, because we need to know what your current metabolism is set at.

John: You need a realistic average, right?

Brandon: Exactly. We need an accurate baseline to work off of.

John: Okay.

Brandon: But once you've got that, you take those five to seven days, you average them together, and that's probably going to be fairly close to what your metabolism's set at. And there's no perfect number here. You don't have to spend a ton of time on this, just get the numbers so we can start gathering data.

John: Okay. So we already talked about how we can model this using an app on our phone or doing something online. So the bigger question is, so based on what you just discussed, how do you lose the weight?

Brandon: Okay.

John: How do use this system to lose weight?

Brandon: Typically what most of us do is we'll do some radical cut. The problem with this, if you do a radical cut, something called metabolic adaption occurs, and you're going to lose for a finite amount of time until your metabolism adjusts to whatever you're consuming.

So we're going to try and take advantage of this, we're going to work with our body, not against it.

John: Okay.

Brandon: We're going to do, instead of one drastic cut, we're going to do several small incremental cuts. So something like 200 or 300 calories. And I like to take it from carbohydrates first. You don't want to do it too much, because carbs have been unnecessarily vilified. We get our energy from carbs. If you want good workouts, you have got to be getting enough carbs. But I'll initially take a number, 200 to 300 calories; and then you have got to monitor, you have got to gather data just like we gathered data before, but you're going to weigh yourself every day and kind of watch what your body's doing. And as long as you're continuing along a track that you want, just keep . . . there's no sense to do any more cuts if you're continuing to lose about a pound per week, there's no need to continue to do additional cuts.

Now, after a matter of weeks, the body will acclimate. Metabolic adaptation occurs, and you're going to stop losing weight at that cut. Then you just do another small, incremental cut, or you could do some variation of a small incremental cut and a slight uptick in cardio, to make sure you're burning enough calories.

John: You know, and Brandon, this makes so much sense to me because when you put it in these terms, and for those of us who've worked out with weights will understand this: It's almost like when you start a strength training program. You don't start, Day One, by benching 135 pounds, then Day Two go to 350.

Brandon: 100 percent.

John: It just doesn't work. It will never work. So in order to get my strength up, I do the incremental increases to get to a point where I'm going to get the strength that I need. Same here, it's just kind of the opposite flow, where I do incremental decreases.

Brandon: Exactly.

John: In my caloric intake to get where I need to go. Is that what we're talking about here?

Brandon: Exactly, 100 percent right there.

John: Yeah, and that makes a lot of sense.

Brandon: Yep. And then to continue on . . . and a problem with a lot of the mainstream diets is there's no exit plan. So I do this radical cut, my body adjusts, my metabolism adjusts, and now what do I do? I can either—my options are terrible—I can either continue to cut, or I just give up and go back to what I was before. Neither of those are desirable. So what we want to do here is, you don't want to cut so . . . you don't want to get your calories too low. We don't want

our metabolism adjusting to really significantly low calories. Personally, I won't go anywhere below 1,600 calories.

John: Okay.

Brandon: And again—

John: It's tough. That's a very low caloric intake.

Brandon: Yeah, I won't go . . . I don't like going any lower than that. You start losing muscle, your body's not processing, and metabolic adaptation just is getting too low.

John: Okay.

Brandon: So you do these small incremental cuts, you get down to where you want to be, or even if you're not where you want to be, you still just don't go—you don't want to go too low. You get to this point where the body's no longer adapting, but let's say you've gone down to 1,700, 1,800 calories, and now your body's no longer losing weight—it's adjusted. Well, you've been cutting for 16 weeks. It's time to reverse diet, or go back. So just as you want small incremental cuts to go down, you're going to do the opposite, and you're going to do some small incremental additions to take yourself back up. The end goal being, you want to get your metabolism set back to that original 2,500, but if you want slowdown, the small, incremental cuts to lose weight and then slow back up, you're working with your metabolism. Ideally, what's happened now is you're back to your 2,500 maintenance, but at a leaner, healthier body weight than when you started.

John: Wow. That makes so much sense. That makes so much sense. So you'll get back to that calorie level that you were used to, but you just won't see the weight gain associated with it or the fat increase associated with it.

Brandon: Absolutely. And then the big important point is if you spent 16 weeks cutting to get there, spend 16 weeks adding to get back.

John: Okay, it makes so much sense. That was a really . . . I really enjoyed it. I actually wrote that down. It just makes sense to me that you're doing that. And again, also . . . I just talked about this on previous podcasts, cardiovascular, strength training also important. Is that correct?

Brandon: Yes, very. Very.

John: You can't out exercise a bad diet. Correct?

Brandon: Correct.

John: All right, so is there any final point you want to bring up before we end today's conversation, Brandon?

Brandon: Ah, we just need to do what we can to make sure we have a healthy relationship with food. Food shouldn't be associated with guilt, and we are all going to fall short at some point in a diet. You're going to fail. Making a mistake, a one-time thing that's a mistake. That's not a problem. What we don't want to do is continue to make repeated mistakes, because now we're starting a new habit. So basically, just if you fall short on a diet, which we all will at some point, get up, dust yourself off, do better tomorrow.

John: Keep moving forward. I think that's the best way to look at it. Just don't give up on it, just do better tomorrow.

Brandon: Yep. Now, if you find that you're dusting yourself off and trying to do better tomorrow six out of seven days a week, your plan's probably too aggressive. Pick something that's—

John: Time to change your plan.

Brandon: Yeah, pick something that's a little easier to stick to and more sustainable.

John: That's your common-sense approach at dieting, right there. Dieting 101, right? Excellent, excellent stuff.

Okay Brandon, listen. I really appreciate your time, again, talking to us about diet and meal prep. I think that's valuable to anybody who's listening to this, especially when you're talking about the law enforcement career and our options to what we have to eat out there, which are sometimes very few and very high in calories.

For those who are listening, please take . . . if you have the chance, you can visit the VALOR website, VALORforblue.org. That being said, Brandon, again, thank you for your time, and I thank everyone for listening.

Brandon: Thank you.

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