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Healthy Weight Loss: The Only Way to Go If You Aim to Succeed

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Healthy Weight Loss: The Only Way to Go If You Aim to Succeed

Prepare for Healthy Weight Loss

Healthy weight loss requires planning and lots of knowledge, but the payoff is more than worth it!

There are lots of reasons for people who are overweight or obese to lose weight.

- To be healthier.
- To look better.
- To feel better.
- To have more energy.

No matter what the reason, successful weight loss and healthy weight management depend on sensible goals and expectations. If you set sensible goals for yourself, chances are you'll be more likely to meet them and have a better chance of keeping the weight off. In fact, losing even five to 10 percent of your weight is the kind of goal that can help improve your health.

Most overweight people should lose weight gradually. For safe and healthy weight loss, try not to exceed a rate of two pounds per week. Sometimes, people with serious health problems associated with obesity may have legitimate reasons for losing weight rapidly. If so, a physician's supervision is required.

What you weigh is the result of several factors:

- how much and what kinds of food you eat
- whether your lifestyle includes regular physical activity
- whether you use food to respond to stress and other situations in your life
- your physiologic and genetic make-up
- your age and health status.

Successful weight loss and weight management should address all of these factors. And that's the reason to ignore products and programs that promise quick and easy results, or that promise permanent results without permanent changes in your lifestyle. Any ad that says you can lose weight without lowering the calories you take in and/or increasing your physical activity is selling fantasy and false hope. In fact, some people would call it fraud. Furthermore, the use of some products may not be safe.

A Realistic Approach

Many people who are overweight or obese have decided not to diet per se, but to concentrate on engaging in regular physical activity and maintaining healthy eating habits in accordance with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, emphasizing lowered fat

consumption, and an increase in vegetables, fruits and whole grains. Others — who try to diet — report needing help to achieve their weight management goals.

For many people who are overweight or obese, long-term — and healthy — weight management generally requires sensible goals and a commitment to make realistic changes in their lifestyle and improve their health. A lifestyle based on healthy eating and regular physical activity can be a real lifesaver.

What is a Healthy Diet?

In these times, there seem to be as many "healthy diets" as there are experts. While our specific dietary needs may vary according to our individual body types, metabolisms, and genetics, there are some basic guidelines that can be useful in determining which foods are nutritious and which are not.

1. Emphasize fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are high in antioxidants-- nutrients that help neutralize toxins in the body. Generally, brightly colored fruits and vegetables contain the highest levels of antioxidants: for example, yellow, orange, and dark green vegetables; citrus fruits; and cruciferous vegetables (those in the cabbage family, such as broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage). While taking antioxidants in supplement form can be beneficial, those found in foods are much more powerful.

Fruits and vegetables are also high in other vitamins and minerals. Vitamin C, which is supportive to the immune system, is abundant in strawberries, oranges, and bell peppers. Carrots, sweet potatoes, and winter squash are a powerhouse of beta-carotene, which is important for vision. Green leafy vegetables support the health of our bones and teeth, among other things, with high levels of calcium, magnesium, and vitamin K.

Some helpful guidelines to follow: Eat two to four pieces of fresh fruit daily, and fill half your plate with vegetables at any given meal.

2. Eat the amount and combination of whole foods that make you feel best. There are many different approaches to healthy eating. If you feel good eating a high-protein diet with lots of non-starchy vegetables and few carbohydrates, it may be the best diet for you. However, if you feel best eating a diet high in grains, vegetables, and beans, that may be the best diet for you.

Animals that are grass-fed and/or raised on organic foods (and all the products those animals produce) seem to have superior nutritional profiles. In addition, studies have shown that children who grow up eating organic foods have lower levels of toxic chemicals in their bodies than those raised eating conventional foods.

Keys to Permanent Weight Loss

Finding an effective eating strategy is serious business if you are considerably overweight and are interested in improving your long-term health. Halting any further weight gain and gradually shedding pounds can have beneficial effects on blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, your risk of having a heart attack or stroke, joint pain, and the energy and ability to do everyday activities.

What you really need is a plan you can stick with for many, many moons. It should be as good for your heart, bones, colon, and psyche as it is for your waistline. It should offer plenty of tasty and healthy choices, banish few foods, and not require an extensive and expensive list of groceries or supplements.

Low carbs

Avoiding carbohydrates, so the thinking goes, forces the body to burn fat. Does this theory translate into actual weight loss? Yes and no — it depends on the individual and the time period. Some people lose a substantial amount of weight on a low-carb diet, while others lose little and some actually gain weight. And for those who lose, the effects typically aren't permanent. After a few months, weight loss tends to slow and reverse, just as happens with most other diet types.

Bottom line: Low-carb diets work for some people and not others. There's no evidence that their short-term effects produce long-term weight loss, while the added expense could lighten your wallet. Equally important, we know little about the long-term health effects of high-protein, high-fat, low-carb diets.

Low fat

Once the main strategy for losing weight, low-fat diets have been elbowed aside by the low-carb frenzy. Scores of low-fat diets have been promoted over the years. One of the best known is Dr. Dean Ornish's Eat More, Weigh Less plan. Since fat contains 9 calories per gram while carbohydrates contain 4, you can theoretically double your food intake without taking in more calories by cutting back on fatty foods and eating more that are full of carbohydrates, especially water-rich fruits and vegetables.

Keep in mind that the Ornish plan doesn't stop at a whole-grain, vegetarian, very-low-fat (less than 10% of calories from fat) diet, but also includes exercise, stress management, and group support.

Bottom line: Low-fat diets have unquestionably helped some people lose weight and keep it off. They've been dismal failures for others, in part because they tend to be less filling, less flavorful, and all around less satisfying than other eating strategies. They also tend to be fairly restrictive about food choices, which can limit your options when dining out.

There are many other options for dieting, including eating correct portions and following

the recommended food pyramid guidelines. Before choosing any plan for permanent weight loss, it is recommended that you seek advice from your physician.

Nutritional Food Choices

One of the biggest reasons that diets and attempts at healthy eating fail is boredom. Many folks just do not know how to keep a healthy diet interesting day after day, and it can be quite a challenge.

Given the huge variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, meats and other healthy foods at the local grocery store, however, it is definitely possible to create exciting, nutritious meals that will keep that boredom at bay.

However, it is important to check the nutritional qualities of the fruits and vegetables you buy, and not simply assume that all fruits and vegetables are equally healthy.

As far as what to eat, buying anything at the grocery from the following list is a straight path to better health. These foods include:

- Fruits like bananas, berries and apples
- Whole grains including bread and pasta
- Low-fat dairy including milk and yogurt
- Chicken, turkey and fish
- Vegetables like spinach, squash and tomatoes
- Natural peanut butter
- Beans and legumes
- Almonds and other nuts

Foods to avoid

Refined foods are big industry, and draw a gigantic profit. When industries are accustomed to bringing in big profits, they do what any industry would do: protect those profits at all costs. In addition, these profits bring power, and information can be put forth, covered over, or otherwise manipulated to protect that power.

Most people know which foods they should stay away from. The obvious ones include desserts, high-fat meals, candy, fast food and fried food. In fact, most people will feel a big difference simply by staying away from these kinds of foods. The not-so-obvious ones include:

- Pasta
- Fat-free foods
- Most frozen meals
- Processed meats like fake cold cuts

- Soda and juices
- Creamy meals

Your biggest weapon in the battle to eat right is common sense. Use it!

Glycemic Index and Glycemic Load

You may have heard the buzz words "glycemic index" or "glycemic load" when it comes to certain foods. The glycemic index of food is important when constructing a healthy, balanced diet and to promote overall health.

What is glycemic index (GI)? GI of food is an indication of how fast sugar enters our bloodstream, or the immediate effect of eating carbohydrates on blood sugar levels. GI refers to the carbohydrate content in foods and is ranked by number. What this means is carbohydrate in foods is broken down into glucose, or blood sugar, and the higher the GI number, the faster the food empties into the bloodstream after digestion.

What is the difference between GI and GL? As described above, the GI indicates the carbohydrate in foods and its potential to raise blood sugar levels. Glycemic load is essentially the effect of food on our blood sugar level.

You can calculate GL by multiplying the GI of a food by the number of carbohydrate grams contained in the food and then dividing the total by 100. A lower GL indicates that there is a gradual release of glucose (sugar) in to the blood from the digestion. Therefore, blood sugar levels are not likely to rise very quickly. It is recommended to have a lower glycemic load, and to consume mostly foods with a lower GI in general.

How is the GI of certain foods determined? To determine the glycemic index of a food, typically, individuals are given a test food that provides 50 grams of carbohydrate and a control food (white bread or pure glucose) providing the same amount of carbohydrate on different days (JAMA, 2002).

Blood samples for the determination of glucose are taken prior to eating and at regular intervals after eating over the next several hours. The changes in blood glucose over time are plotted as a curve.

The glycemic index is calculated as the area under the glucose curve after the test food is eaten, divided by the corresponding area after the control food is eaten. The value is multiplied by 100 to represent a percentage of the control food. (Source: Linus Pauling Institute: <http://lpi.oregonstate.edu/infocenter/foods/grains/giglrefs.html#ref2>)

Note: Different sources list the GI of foods. You will probably notice some differences in the GI of foods between sources. (For example, a baked potato may have a GI of 85 in one source, while another source may cite a GI of 93).

What determines the GI number? Refined carbohydrates in sweets (cakes, cookies, etc.) will likely have a higher GI (causing an immediate rise in the blood sugar). There are of course some exceptions to this, but as a general rule, foods with a high fiber content such as whole grains and high fiber cereals tend to have a lower GI (desirable). This is because they do not produce a rapid rise in blood sugar after eating them.

Tips for Lowering Glycemic Load:

- Increase the consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes (peas and beans), nuts, and whole grains.
- Use whole grains. "Whole" means the hull or skin is still attached, which slows down the assimilation of the carbohydrates inside. An obvious example is brown vs. white rice. Brown rice is still encased in its hull.
- Decrease the consumption of sugary foods like cookies, cakes, candy, and soft-drinks.

Healthy Eating Plans

Late night snacking can ruin your diet. When time is structured, you're less likely to think about food. Why are so many people tempted to snack late at night?

The #1 reason is boredom. When the mind is not stimulated, it tends to seek pleasure and eating is a very pleasurable experience. Here are tips for eating healthy that will prevent those unplanned snacks that add unwanted calories.

Don't Skip Dinner - Skipping dinner will set you up for failure. The temptation for eating junk food or whatever is available becomes overwhelming when you are very hungry. You can help your weight loss effort tremendously by not skipping meals.

Include a Light Dessert for Dinner - Any light dessert will do if you love sweets. Desserts that are less than 150 calories can easily be added to your diet to give your sweet tooth a real treat. When you're satisfied, you are less tempted to snack later at night.

Watch Less TV – Weight loss will certainly not come by way of deceptive infomercials. You'll also be surprised how watching television can cause you to snack and cause "out of control" eating. Your mind is not working and boredom unsuspectingly creeps in.

Boredom causes you to want something pleasurable such as food. Also TV commercials, with their tempting images of food constantly coming at you, are notorious for triggering you to start eating again, especially treats that are not healthy.

Make Plans for Fun Projects - Write down projects that you always wanted to do. Using your spare time to do worthwhile chores will keep your mind off food. Projects can include helping your kids with homework, sewing, developing a business plan, family games, 30 minutes on the treadmill or stationary bike.

It's hard to believe, but very true that fun and productive projects can help you lose weight in a very healthy way.

Plans for Snacks: If you're the type of person that just can't avoid snacking late at night, then plan 1 or 2 low calorie snacks. Plan something like sugar free hot chocolate with light whip cream or 1/2 bag of light microwave popcorn at the time you're most vulnerable to eating snacks. This way, you consume only 70 to 100 calories, and do very little damage to your weight loss effort.

Healthy Eating Habits

Healthy eating habits are still possible when you're always on the go. Here's some tips that are good to know!

1. Eat a good breakfast. When there isn't time to sit down and enjoy your morning meal, grab a bagel, piece of fruit, and some juice.
2. If you must eat fast foods, choose wisely. Choose pizza with half the cheese, a regular size roast beef sandwich, baked potato, or green salad with reduced calorie dressing. Limit high fat offering like french fries, fried chicken or fish sandwiches and watch out for salad dressing.
3. Keep healthful snacks on hand in case hunger strikes. Possibilities include fresh or dried fruit, pretzels, unbuttered popcorn, rice cakes or whole wheat crackers. Consider raw vegetables with low fat yogurt or cottage cheese dip.
4. Eat plenty of foods that are rich in calcium. If you don't like milk, try to include ample amounts of low fat yogurt, low fat cheese, and green leafy vegetables in your diet.
5. If you need to lose weight, do it sensibly. Starvation and/or diets that offer a quick fix usually backfire and are harmful. There is no truth to the theories that suggest eating foods in any particular combination will promote weight loss. The only safe way to lose weight, feel good while doing it, and keep it off is to eat a balanced diet.
6. Sugar provides calories in your diet but few other nutrients and it contributes significantly to tooth decay. Use it sparingly and consider sweetening coffee, tea, cereal and fruit with diet sweeteners instead.
7. That salad bar can be either an asset or a detriment to your diet depending on how you choose from it. Of course, leafy greens, raw vegetable and fresh fruit are beneficial. But if you choose lots of creamy dressing, bacon bits, and mayonnaise based salads, the calories and fat may equal or even exceed those of a burger and fries. Try dipping instead.

8. If you drink alcohol, keep in mind that it supplies calories but no nutritional value. A light beer, a glass of wine, or an ounce of liquor each has about 100 calories. There are also many health problems associated with drinking alcohol.
9. Drink lots of water. Your body needs at least eight glasses a day, and if you exercise vigorously, you may need more. To remind yourself, carry a water bottle along and keep it handy.
10. Remember, food is a lot more than nourishment for our bodies. Enjoy and savor it.

Nutritional Vitamin – Weight Loss Supplements

Nutritional vitamin supplements are big business. Many say they're unnecessary, while others contend that they're more necessary than ever. They've been a source of controversy and debate for many years. Why?

They've been around a good long time in one form or another. Cod liver oil was widely given to children daily only 100 years ago. Those same children would never have dreamed that one day people would pay lots of money to not only take fish oil, but take it more than once a day. You've probably seen the daily vitamins sold in most stores that even many doctors are now grudgingly stating are fine to take regularly.

The heart of the controversy is both the types and potencies of many supplements. Often a single dose contains a nutrient or nutrients in such high concentration as to be completely impossible to consume in a proportionate amount of foods that contain that nutrient or nutrients.

Many in the medical establishment insist that this is at best a foolish and at worst a potentially dangerous practice. They state that some nutrients, being water soluble, are simply passed through the system and others that are fat soluble can be absorbed into fat reserves in hazardous levels if ingested without caution.

Those who support the use of supplements counter that passing part of a dose of a water soluble nutrient is worthwhile because it ensures saturation of that nutrient at a cellular level, maxing out the body's available supply. The supplement industry itself has added precautionary statements to their labeling to warn of the potential hazard of ingesting a high level of fat soluble nutrients.

Even so, for vitamins and minerals, there is some monitoring by the Food and Drug Administration. For others that are not recognized as essential nutrients, the truth becomes less clear.

Benefits may only be implied at best, with statements denying solid evidence of any now a requirement of law. How much garlic do you need each day? How much feverfew?

There still remains no way to know other than the assertions of alternative health care proponents.

If you truly desire to take nutritional supplements, start with small doses under the advice and supervision of qualified professionals such as a registered dietician. After all, they're not called supplements for nothing.

Why You Need to Exercise Caution When Taking Weight Loss Supplements

Americans spend billions of dollars each year on weight-loss supplements. Although we wouldn't buy a car or a dinner without knowing some details, many who purchase these supplements have no idea what is in them, or what independent reports say about their safety and effectiveness.

Even though the Food and Drug Administration has charged some companies with using banned ingredients, and the Federal Trade Commission has successfully prosecuted marketers who made illegal claims, the same products, or copycat versions, still remain available.

Some weight loss supplements contain ingredients meant to suppress the appetite. Caffeine and its herbal counterparts, guarana, bitter orange and yerba maté, as well as ephedra (ma huang), fall into this category. Animal studies suggest that they may slightly suppress the appetite, but the limited human studies lasted only a few months. All these ingredients are nervous system stimulants, so they commonly produce side effects like headaches, insomnia, elevated blood pressure and heart palpitations.

Deceptive labeling

Product labeling can be deceptive: Weight-loss supplements labeled ephedra- or caffeine-free may contain other ingredients from the list above, which may pose the same health risks. Although ephedra (ma huang) has been banned by the FDA, you may still see it in some supplements. In a summary of more than 50 trials, this substance created a 2 to 3.6-fold increase in the risk of psychological, heart and digestive system problems.

Supplement manufacturers claim other ingredients aid weight loss by speeding up the metabolism. For example, EGCG, a phytochemical found in green tea, is being studied for its potential to reduce cancer risk. Some initial studies suggest it could slightly increase the rate at which calories burn. Now it can be found in many weight-loss supplements and "weight-loss vitamins."

However, since there are only extremely short initial studies so far, the body might adapt to EGCG, reducing its effect over time. In addition, the weight loss benefit seen

with EGCG amounts to about 60 to 70 calories a day. This small difference is more likely to help prevent a gradual yearly weight gain than reverse excessive weight gain.

Also, the effect of EGCG appears to depend on the dose. Supplements with amounts of 30 to 40 mg of EGCG, which is commonly seen in these products, may not have the same effect as a dose over 250 mg used in the studies.

Few significant effects

Supplements may also contain ingredients that manufacturers state will block the absorption of fat or carbohydrates. Chitosan is a common example, and a few preliminary studies made it appear promising. However, several controlled studies found that chitosan had no significant effect on fat absorption. In the most recent study, men would need seven months to lose one pound of body fat. There was no fat loss for women.

Another group of ingredients are said to increase the feeling of fullness and decrease eating. Guar gum appears safe for this purpose, but 11 well-controlled studies show it has no benefit for weight loss. Psyllium can help control blood sugar and blood cholesterol, but studies do not support its reputed ability to reduce eating and assist weight loss.

There are more than 50 individual supplements and 125 combination products now available for people who want to lose weight. Yet a Harvard Medical School review of these products that set standards for product quality, safety and effectiveness concluded that none of them met all three standards.

Future research may identify some safe and effective ingredients for weight loss, but for now it seems smarter to invest in walking shoes, a gym membership, or healthier food instead.

What's The Deal with Herbal Dietary Supplements

Keep in mind that herbal dietary supplements can affect other substances in your body, including your medications.

More than 100 million Americans take vitamins or dietary supplements daily—including dozens of herbal nutrition supplements—and with good reason. Research has shown that many herbal nutrition supplements can:

- Provide essential nutrients
- Boost the human immune system
- Enhance memory and sleep quality

Yet despite the popularity of herbal nutrition supplements to promote better health, not everyone who uses them is well informed about all of their properties or how they may

interact—or interfere—with a variety of prescription drugs and other medication. As a result:

- Many people fail to share information about their use of herbal nutrition supplements with their health providers
- Health providers don't think to ask if patients are taking herbal nutrition supplements

Both are oversights that could have dangerous consequences.

If you've had surgery, you were probably told that you should stop taking aspirin several days before the operation to avoid excessive bleeding, even if you normally take aspirin daily to help protect your heart. (NOTE: There is new information that stopping aspirin therapy suddenly can increase your risk of heart attack or stroke.

But what about herbal nutrition supplements that may increase bleeding, decrease the effectiveness of anti-clotting medications, or elevate heart rate or high blood pressure under certain conditions?

Benefits and Side Effects

People who are contemplating surgery, or even taking medications regularly, should become familiar with the power and properties of any herbal nutrition supplements they are taking.

Herbal dietary supplements can provide important health benefits but it's important to know how they react to medication you may already be taking. Before you take Herbal dietary supplements, check with your health care provider to be sure the herbal supplements are safe for you.

The Vital Role of Water in Weight Loss

The role of water in weight loss can't be overemphasized. Keep drinking those fluids while losing weight.

Water plays an enormous role in how well our body functions. Simply put, the more fresh water we drink, the healthier we become. Weight loss can also be achieved by drinking the right amount of water daily. Various advantages of drinking water include:

Water helps maintain muscle tone, weight loss, clear and healthy skin. It helps prevent lower back pain, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, headaches, migraines, asthma, allergies, colitis, rheumatoid, arthritis, depression, hypertension, cholesterol, hangovers, neck pain, muscle pain, joint pain, bloating, constipation, ulcers, low energy levels, stomach pain, confusion and disorientation.

Water regulates body temperature, remove toxins and wastes, cushion and lubricate joints, decrease risk of kidney stones, protect tissues, organs and the spinal cord from shock and damage.

Water assists in the digestion & absorption of food, and in transporting oxygen and nutrients to the cells. Drinking water is extremely beneficial for weight loss.

There are many benefits associated with a higher intake of water:

Water contains no calories, fat, or cholesterol and is low in sodium. It is also a natural appetite suppressant. Studies have proved that a low consumption of water allows more fat to be deposited instead of being metabolized into energy. Thus, higher the consumption of water, lower is the amount of fat deposited.

Water regulates all bodily functions including the activities of circulating and dissolving. Every enzymatic and chemical reaction of the body occurs in the presence of water. Water also transports hormones, nutrients, oxygen and antibodies through the blood stream and lymphatic system. In addition, our bodies' proteins and enzymes are more efficient in solutions of lower viscosity (i.e., diluted), thus helping in weight loss and fitness. Muscles are primarily composed of water.

Therefore, it's only logical to drink lots of water if you want to have more muscle mass. Water also ensures that a proper muscle contraction can be achieved so that the working muscle is properly exhausted. This again prevents deposition of fat.

The popular advice to drink lots of water is no diet fad; it's based on solid research about its functions in the body. Don't skimp... bottoms up!!

A Word About Detox Diets

Detox diets sound great – they claim that you will not only lose weight, but you'll also rid your body of all sorts of harmful toxins and be so much healthier for it. According to this report from the BBC, it's probably best not to rush into one without considering several points.

What's a detox diet?

Detox diets vary, but they typically advise restriction of the diet to raw vegetables, fruit, water and yoghurt - with strict avoidance of foods such as meat, fish, alcohol and stimulants (including coffee). The recommended duration of this regime also varies, but may be prescribed for up to a week or ten days.

After a week on such a minimal and limited diet, it's not surprising that people report feeling lighter and less lethargic. These are symptoms of a lack of calories rather than

the elimination of toxins from the body. Headaches are a common side effect of caffeine withdrawal along with tiredness and irritability in some people.

Do they work?

Although detox diets may make you feel better, the scientific basis for such a stringent diet is somewhat lacking and there's little evidence that there's any good to be gained from following them.

Of course, it's true to say that food isn't all pure nutrients and the average diet will inevitably contain some toxic substances (alcohol, for example). Fortunately, the human body is well equipped to deal with such toxins, and they are effectively removed and excreted by the liver within hours of consumption.

The basic misconception of detox diets, however, is that fruits and vegetables are low in toxins while meat and fish lead to the accumulation of harmful substances in the body. In fact, the opposite is often true; vegetables such as cabbage and onions are high in naturally occurring toxins, while meat and fish often have low levels. The greatest irony is that the liver, the body's detoxification organ, can most effectively breakdown and eliminate toxins on a high-protein diet such as one rich in meat and fish.

Of course, fruit and vegetables are very important components of a healthy diet, but the idea that you should exist solely on such foods for days on end isn't consistent with the principle of a healthy balanced diet. Your daily diet should contain at least five portions of fruit and vegetables as well as lean meat, carbohydrates and dairy products.

Eating a healthy diet on a daily basis will help the body function properly and it shouldn't be necessary to pursue a detoxification regimen. However, if you do find the urge to detox, use it as an excuse to kick-start a new healthy eating regime.

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