

Permanent Weight Control

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Many people believe that to lose weight they have to go on a low-calorie diet. That often means starving oneself until the diet is no longer tolerable. Other people believe that the answer to weight loss lies in any number of fad diets, such as low-carbohydrate diets. However, many of these diets also contain numerous health risks.

Any of these extreme weight loss strategies make it unlikely that anyone will be able to adhere to the diet for very long. Then the weight goes right back on—and then some. Happily, there is a much better and easier way that offers many other health benefits, too.

No More Diets

The first thing to realize is that changing eating habits must be more than a short-term means to an end. Changing eating habits is the cornerstone of permanent weight control. There is no way to “lose 20 pounds in two short weeks” and make it last. Very-low-calorie diets cause two major problems: They lower one’s metabolic rate, making it harder to slim down, and they lead to bingeing.

Fat Versus Complex Carbohydrates

It is a myth that pasta, bread, potatoes, and rice are fattening. In fact, carbohydrate-rich foods are perfect for permanent weight control. Carbohydrates contain less than half the calories of fat, which means that replacing fatty foods with complex carbohydrates automatically cuts calories. But calories are only part of the story. A recent study in China found that, on the average, Chinese people eat 20 percent more calories than Americans, but they are also slimmer.¹ Part of this is due to the sedentary American lifestyle, but there is more to it than exercise alone. Earlier studies have shown that obese people do not consume more calories than non-obese people—in many cases, they consume less.^{2,3}

The body treats carbohydrates differently than fat calories. The difference comes with how the body stores the energy of different food types. It is very inefficient for the body to store the energy of carbohydrates as body fat—it burns 23 percent

of the calories of the carbohydrate—but fat is converted easily into body fat. Only 3 percent of the calories in fat are burned in the process of conversion and storage.⁴ It is the type of food, not so much the quantity, that affects body fat the most.⁵

Protein

Although protein and carbohydrates have almost the same number of calories per gram, foods that are high in protein—particularly animal products—are also usually high in fat. Even “lean” cuts of meat have much more fat than a healthy body needs. And animal products always lack fiber. Fiber helps make foods more satisfying without adding many calories, and it is only found in foods from plants.

Exercise

Exercise is essential. Aerobic exercise speeds up the breakdown of fat in the body and makes sure that muscle is not lost. Toning exercises and weight-lifting help firm muscles and increase muscle mass. A combination of exercises will help one achieve a slimmer, firmer, healthier body in a shorter period of time. The trick is to find enjoyable activities that fit one’s lifestyle. Walking is popular because it requires no special equipment and can be done anywhere at anytime.

Conclusion

The best and least complicated choice for a healthier, longer, happier life is a weight-control program based on a low-fat, vegetarian diet high in complex carbohydrates, complemented by regular exercise.

References

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