

EATING TO LOSE WEIGHT vs. EATING FOR LONGEVITY

Gerizatcoff, M.S.Ed., M.S., C.N.S

There is one very important point that we all must remember when we embark on a program to lose weight. And that is, there is no one diet that works for everyone. One must develop one's own diet or rather, a style of eating that is appropriate for the individual. That comes from trial and error and may in fact, take years to refine. The one concept that is universal to weight loss is that energy expenditure (burning calories) must be greater than energy intake (food). Successful weight loss (kept off for 5 years or more) is accomplished with a combination of a mild caloric restriction and an increase in energy expenditure through exercise. While the research shows that those who simply restrict calories may lose more weight in the beginning, those who exercise tend to keep it off. The weight loss of those who restrict calories only, tends to include loss of body protein and that means lean body mass. This is detrimental to long-term weight maintenance because it results in a decreased metabolic rate. Those who exercise maintain and increase their lean-body mass while losing increased amounts of bodyfat. The scale moves a little slower, but the weight loss is a true loss of bodyfat.

We all know that muscle weighs more and takes up less space than fat. The important point is that muscle is a metabolic tissue and requires energy to be synthesized and maintained, approximately 50 calories per pound per day. So the more muscle you have on your body, the more calories you burn all day, not just for the few hours after an exercise bout, which is what happens with cardiovascular exercise. Don't get me wrong, cardiovascular exercise is important to weight loss but resistance or weight training is equally as important, especially for weight maintenance.

Back to diets. A lot of people find initial success with the Weight Watcher's Points Program. This program can be a good start because it provides for a mild caloric restriction and people are allowed to eat whatever foods they choose provided they stay within the number of points they have been assigned. The number of points (calories) that a person is allowed per day depends on their current weight and decreases as the person loses weight. The number of points/calories drops because the need for energy decreases as weight decreases.

There is no denying that people can and do lose weight with this system. However, it does not distinguish between food choices or provide for sufficient intake of nutrients like vitamins, minerals, antioxidants or phytochemicals (not unlike the Atkin's Diet), all of which have been correlated to good health and prevention of disease. It's okay to eat pizza, chips and chocolate cake as long as you stay within your points. This can be very helpful in the beginning as it allows people to eat the foods they like and drop the first few, very important, motivating pounds without drastic lifestyle changes. Group counseling sessions are beneficial, but permanent behavioral changes are needed to sustain a long-term weight loss and that requires at least 8 to 12 weeks of practicing the desired behavior.

Weight Watchers has a success rate of 4%, the same as most other "diets". Sound impressive? That's a ninety-six percent failure rate. Why? Because people are good at losing weight, they just can't keep it off! Remember, a successful weight loss is one that is maintained for five years.

The problem essentially starts with the word "diet". Look at the first three letters of the word. It spells "die". Doesn't that make you feel good? Diets inherently mean denial and deprivation. Losing weight is a tough proposition that requires mental fortitude and a real desire to change. So why go through all that work only to gain the weight back? How many people do you know that have lost the same fifteen or twenty pounds over and over again? Every time we lose weight and gain it back, the metabolism slows a

Gerizatcoff

Geraldine Zatcoff, M.S.Ed., M.S., C.N.S.

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little because the body thinks we are trying to kill it. Every time we lose weight, the toxins that are stored in adipose tissue get released into the bloodstream. That's why it's so important to drink lots of water if you are trying to lose weight. Repeated losing and gaining of weight is called "yo-yo" dieting and it puts tremendous stress on the body.

So if you're considering going on a "diet", think about not only what you want to look like in five years, but how you want to feel. Do you want to live long and die short or live short and die long, all the while consuming hundreds of dollars of prescription medications every month for various degenerative diseases. Your long-term health is directly related to your nutrition. So use whatever "diet" works best for you to get you started but remember that there are no shortcuts. You must do the work necessary to make permanent lifestyle changes. And that includes exercise and behavior modification. The good news is that there's room for everything in a healthy diet, including pizza and chocolate cake. You can have your favorite foods by learning how to incorporate them with healthy choices and practicing a little restraint. You can have what you want, you just can't have it all the time. Pick your poison carefully. Personally, I prefer a nice glass of red wine to dessert most anytime. But that's just me.

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