

RESOLUTE RESOLUTIONS: NEW STUDY FINDS STICKING TO DIET MORE IMPORTANT THAN TYPE OF DIET FOR WEIGHT LOSS

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A new study recently reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA, Jan. 05) found that the key to losing weight may be more related to the person's ability to stick to a plan, rather than the particular diet. The study looked at four popular diets including Weight Watchers, Atkins, Zone and Ornish. All diets resulted in a modest but statistically significant weight loss at one year, with no statistically significant differences between diets. In addition, no single diet produced satisfactory adherence rates. An accompanying editorial stated that once a weight loss of several kilograms occurs, a "substantial step-up in the amount of physical activity and conscientious monitoring as part of a more comprehensive behavior modification appear particularly important and are likely much more relevant adaptations than the macronutrient composition of the diet". What does that mean? It means that regular exercise and learning to control yourself are more important than removing carbohydrates or restricting fat from your diet.

Hello? This is not a newsflash? Nutritionists, fitness and wellness professionals have known for years that diets don't work because people eventually go off them, especially so, when they are too restrictive. All of the diets mentioned above have a less than 5% success rate. A successful weight loss is one that is maintained for at least 5 years. People are good at losing weight they're just not good at keeping it off. Why? Because sustained weight loss requires regular exercise and behavior modification. In other words, changing your lifestyle and learning to control your behavior, things that require time, reflection, commitment, and courage. We live in a country of sound bites, quick-fixes, and where bigger is always better. We are surrounded by and bombarded with high-calorie, nutrient-deficient food. The question is this, "just because it's there, do I have to eat it?" The answer is obviously "no", but the question of responsibility remains. You are responsible for what passes through your lips and if you are a parent, for what choices you present to your child. Every time you choose to eat something, you are either moving towards health and wellness or moving towards illness. Permanent weight loss requires accepting responsibility for your behavior and for the choices you make.

The theory of weight loss is actually very simple. If calories taken in exceed calories expended, you gain weight and vice versa. One of the problems contributing to overeating and subsequent weight gain is the fact that nutrient-deficient food does not satisfy the body's needs for vitamins, minerals and other nutrients. In an attempt to get the body the nutrients it needs, the brain sends the body hunger signals. Chances are you will overeat before the signals stop. Interesting isn't it that your hunger could actually be a physiological manifestation of malnourishment. Many of us are overfed and undernourished. Conversely, tasty nutritious food will feed not only your body, but will appeal to and nourish all of your senses. You will feel satiated and cravings for unhealthy food will diminish. The good news is that weight loss is a by-product of feeding your body healthy and nutritious food. So why diet?

Fortunately, there are many healthy foods available and conveniently packaged these days, from baby carrots and pre-washed lettuces to grilled chicken strips and rotisserie chickens. A bit of planning and preparation are required but it's not that hard and you will come to love the delicious taste of fresh food. Here are a few tips:

1. Stay on the perimeter of the grocery store. That's where the fresh food is, including fruits, vegetables, poultry, meats and the bread/dairy aisle.

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2. Eat some raw food every day.
3. Keep your fridge stocked with fresh vegetables and fruit.
4. Utilize the salad bar at the grocery store for cut up veggies if you don't have time.
5. Don't keep junk food in the house. If you're really craving a cookie or brownie, buy one, eat it, savor it, and get over it.
6. Snack on raw, unsalted nuts and dried fruit.
7. Oftentimes perceived hunger is really thirst. Drink a glass of water. If you're still hungry five minutes later, eat something.
8. Always eat breakfast. It gets the metabolism going.
9. Honor your hunger. Don't let yourself get too hungry. It leads to overeating.
10. Limit refined carbohydrates such as white flour and sugar. This is the single most important thing you can do to improve your diet.

Cooking for and feeding yourself is an act of self-love. Yes, it does require a commitment of time and energy, but you have everything to gain and nothing to lose except unwanted pounds and the prospect of diabetes, arthritis, heart disease and a host of other degenerative diseases. If you have specific issues or need help getting started, enlist the help of a qualified nutritionist. And remember to take the stairs!

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