

## Weight-Loss 101

### Change Your Body By Changing Your Lifestyle

By Dr. Stephanie Pina

Low carb, no carb, low fat, raw food or prepackaged - which diet is your current favorite? In the quest to lose weight and live a healthier life, we have become addicted to following the latest trends in the diet world. It seems as if every month a new diet, exercise contraption or weight-loss protocol springs forth, promising quick and painless results.

When the latest trend appears, we automatically think it's what we've been looking for the entire time. Some people seem to find the right fit and the results are amazing. For the rest of us, we might see some short-term improvement, but soon revert to our old habits of eating on the run, missing meals and not finding time to exercise. No matter which diet or combination of programs you choose to help you lose weight, there are a few common threads linking all effective diets and weight-loss protocols. Focus on these common concepts and take the first important steps toward a healthier lifestyle.



#### **It's About Food Replacement, Not Food Elimination**

Most weight-loss protocols generally focus on limiting what you shouldn't eat and decreasing the amount of food you should eat. Some diets have their own spin on which types of foods are best to eat (or avoid) to achieve optimum weight loss. These diets have been successful for people who consume meals high in

processed foods, limit the variety of foods they eat and/or often eat on the run. The guiding principle to remember is to introduce better mixes of foods into everyday meals. This helps your body change the way it uses food to make energy.



We also have to get more involved with our food choices, particularly when to start and stop eating. Diets do this by emphasizing the elimination of excessive eating, sugars and unnecessary calories, while introducing different food options that support weight loss instead of weight maintenance. Diets promoting foods higher in protein help by slowing down sugar absorption and providing essential amino acids for muscle growth. High-complex-carbohydrate diets help reduce appetite by prolonging the feeling of fullness (satiation) and improving intestinal movement.

When people choose or are placed on calorie-restricting diets, they often are left with few food choices, which leaves them constantly feeling hungry. A similar situation can be seen when whole-food groups such as wheat and dairy are eliminated because of their inflammatory and allergenic properties. Popular juicing and liquid cleansing diets that limit whole-food consumption work by limiting the amount of digestive activity the body has to do. There are people who have reactions to certain food groups - those mentioned above being the most common - which can lead to weight gain and water retention.

Fasting or eliminating allergenic foods can help cleanse the body when done for a short duration. They also help decrease possible inflammatory responses to foods while giving the digestive system time to heal so problem foods can be reintroduced at a later date. These types of restrictive diets should be done under the care of a physician or dietitian, due to complications that can arise if used for too long or in the wrong circumstances.

While considerable focus is placed on the types of *foods* we are or are not eating, *liquid* intake can be just as important. Empty calories in soda, additional caffeine and stimulants from coffee, and even excessive water consumption can leach out essential electrolytes from the body. The overall idea with restricting what we eat is to decrease the amount of energy used to break down what goes in and increase what comes out - namely

energy. It also can help with certain medical conditions like diabetes, heart disease and chronic allergies, all of which have a strong correlation with food intake.

### **The Scale Is Not Always Your Friend**



Now that you have earned your place in the front of the class and are beginning to see the benefits of eating varied, balanced meals, it's time to see how things are measuring up. Most weight loss is measured in pounds and inches with the help of scales and measuring tapes. If you're working with a personal trainer or physician, they might use body mass index (BMI) or total body-fat percentage. The numbers staring back at you might not actually be the best indication of the progress you're making. People often forget to take into consideration that lean muscle weighs more than fat tissue, so as you build more muscle, you will add on muscle weight.

A secret about the scale is that it doesn't care how much weight you gain or lose, or if it's accurate at all. So much emphasis is placed on the measurements we see and less so on how we feel. Changes in numeric measurements should be slow and gradual, which indicate healthy weight loss and ultimately is the best way to keep the weight off. Dramatic weight loss often leads to rebound weight gain once people begin to slip from their program's strict regime. Positive improvements such as increased energy, more restful sleep, changes in how clothes fit, and improved attitude toward continuing lifestyle modifications are all steps in the right direction.

### **Mind Over Matter**

Weight always will have a relationship with what we eat and do in our lives. Outside of those factors, a number of other things influence weight loss. Overall health and medical issues, increasing age, and how we deal with stress can all affect our weight. Stress, whether from external sources such as work demands or internal stress from dealing with physical pain and even normal body functions, should be addressed when trying to lose weight. I tell my patients to think about stress affecting their weight in terms of the

"flight/fight" response. Innately, we either chose to stand up to scary situations or run away as a method of self-preservation. If you have constant stress and don't deal with it, your body conditions itself to run all the time. In order to do that, there has to be plenty of fuel around to help us run as fast as we can for as long as possible. The extra weight we carry, which often is related to high levels of the stress hormone cortisol, serves as our fuel storage. We carry the extra fuel until it gets used up, often leading to difficulty in losing weight. Often, stress-related weight gain can be connected to emotional eating and bingeing.



Diet, exercise and weight-loss trends seem to change over time, but our goal to win the battle against the bulge remains constant. Looking beyond what you're not eating and drinking is important in any weight-loss program. Consistent exercise, dealing with life stressors, and settling realistic goals are keys to successful weight loss. So, the next time you hear about a new diet program, think about how it's different from and similar to all the rest. It might just help you choose the right program for your lifestyle goals and long-term health.

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