

Lose weight the healthy way

By Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RD, LD

It's never too late or too early to turn over a new leaf and resolve to get your waistline under control - again. There is no reason to wait until January 1st for the annual promise to get to a healthy weight.

So which is the best diet? There are thousands of diets to choose from but the challenge is figuring out which one is right for you. It really doesn't matter which diet you choose because all diets help you lose weight.

The secret to success is finding the diet plan that helps you lose weight and keep it off permanently. After all, what good is losing weight if you go right back to your old habits and regain the lost weight?

In search of a healthy diet plan

Experts agree, the best diet is one that is sustainable. It doesn't matter how scientific the program sounds or how fast it claims to work or even how many people have tried it. What matters is whether you can stick with the plan forever. Forget the word 'diet' and consider the plan your new way of eating, at least most of the time.

Nobody is perfect and that should not be your goal. Aim to be a "B" student instead of an "A" student because striving for perfection can lead to binges or throwing in the 'diet' towel.

Another approach is to think of your diet plan as a bank account with an allotment of calories and try to make healthy choices to use your calories. On occasion, it is fine to go over in calories as long as the majority of the time you stick to a consistent routine. In order to have sustainability and satisfy hunger, diet plans should not go below 1200 calories for women and 1500 calories for men. Once you achieve your weight loss goals, these numbers should increase by at least 200 calories per day.

Fit in fitness

The role of exercise has been in the news lately questioning the importance of exercise, especially in weight control. Make no mistake about it, exercise matters. Getting regular physical activity is absolutely essential for your heart, lungs, and muscles, for stress relief and to burn calories.



At the end of the day, losing weight is about taking in fewer calories than you burn so if exercise makes you hungrier; choose low calorie foods and drinks so you don't upset the calorie balance. Bottom line, moving more, working fitness into your daily routine will help you lose weight and make you healthier.

Components of a healthy weight loss plan

There is no such thing as "one size fits all" but a sound diet plan should contain all of the following:

- ▶ Promotes at least 3 meals daily
- ▶ Physical activity component
- ▶ A wide variety of foods from all the food groups, especially nutrient rich, low calorie fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains, low fat dairy
- ▶ Written by a credentialed professional
- ▶ Promotes slow and steady weight loss of 1-2 pounds per week
- ▶ Portion control
- ▶ Allows healthy snacks between meals
- ▶ Does not rely heavily on supplements
- ▶ Includes small portions of your favorite foods and beverages
- ▶ Is science-based
- ▶ Includes a plan to help maintain weight loss
- ▶ Recommends drinking plenty of water
- ▶ Advocates a support network from friends, family or programs
- ▶ An evaluation of your eating habits and suggestions for improvement
- ▶ Is flexible enough to allow eating out
- ▶ Advocates healthy fats and omega 3 fatty fish twice weekly



The most important aspect is to find a diet you can live with so you can start reaping the multiple health benefits of weight loss and regular physical activity.



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