

WEIGHT LOSS: DIET VS. EXERCISE

The two major players in the weight-loss battle are diet and exercise. But can the battle be won using only one of these tools? Many people opt for the easier route, which they believe is dieting. But when you consider how poor the statistics are for long-term weight loss through diets, you need to consider a combination of both. Normally, only about 5% of dieters are successful in keeping weight off, and weight cycling is very common. Usually one-third of weight lost is regained within one year and almost all is regained within three to five years.

How Weight Loss Works

The mechanism of weight loss is simple. It is encompassed in a concept called energy balance. When you burn more calories than you consume, you lose weight. Therefore, to lose weight you need to burn more calories and/or consume fewer calories. The combination of both of these methods is the best way to lose weight and improve your health.

How the Pros Do It

Members of the National Weight Control Registry are people who have lost weight and kept it off successfully for a minimum of one year. Of these people, 89% use a combination of diet and exercise, although 10% have had success using diet alone and 1% used exercise alone. However, research shows that the combination of exercise and diet is more effective than diet alone. Furthermore, while diet alone helps you lose weight, it is exercise that improves your physical fitness.

Getting Started

Combining diet and exercise can be tricky when you're trying to cut calories. It is impor-

tant to make sure that you eat enough so that you have energy to get through your workout, but not so much that you tilt your energy balance back to the weight-gain side.

While guidelines suggest 1 to 2 pounds of weight loss a week, you should set a goal that is both realistic and manageable for your lifestyle and fitness level. Overly aggressive goals often lead to attrition and failure.

Your diet should consist of low-fat food choices and a modest reduction in the total number of calories. Without overwhelming yourself with odd foods and food labels, try simply reduce your food portions by about 10 to 15%. Try to be consistent across the week, instead of dieting more strictly on certain days of the week.

With exercise and activity, people who successfully maintained weight loss exercised an average of an hour or more per day. Longer-duration exercise is usually needed to lose weight and prevent weight re-gain. However, this may be too much for you to begin with, so start small and gradually progress the duration of your activity by 10% each week. For example, increase the duration of your walks from

20 minutes during week one to 22 minutes the following week.

Staying Motivated

Changing your diet and exercise habits involves lifestyle modifications, but maintaining these lifestyle changes can be the real challenge. Many people can lose weight, but only a few can maintain that weight loss. Much of this is due to the fact that the lifestyle modifications made to lose weight need to be permanent. It is normal to regain a few pounds after your initial weight loss. The key is to not get discouraged and stay motivated. The smaller the amount of weight that you regain, the easier it is to lose again, permanently. So frequent monitoring of your weight is necessary to catch yourself when you start to regain weight. Keep in mind that the longer you keep weight off, the easier it becomes. For weight loss to be sustainable, it must be a slow process of 1 to 2 pounds of weight loss per week. Stay focused and goal-oriented and know that successful weight loss is possible!

Additional Resources

The National Weight Control Registry:
www.nwcr.ws

About.com: www.exercise.about.com/od/weightloss/a/shortcuts.htm

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org/GetFit and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts!™



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