

How to Win When Trying to Lose Weight

When people decide to go on a diet, they sometimes find that their efforts are not paying off on the scale. Worse than not losing any weight is learning of a weight gain.

Here are some common diet roadblocks to consider and tips to get on the path to permanent weight loss.

Eating Too Few Calories

While drastically restricting calories may lead to weight loss in the short term, very low-calorie diets are difficult to maintain and often result in a cycle of calorie restriction and overeating. In other words, despite efforts, the scale will not budge. Very low-calorie diets can temporarily slow metabolism because the body needs to conserve energy to function. In addition, it is possible to lose muscle, further slowing the body's energy-burning furnace.

Instead, aim to lose one pound per week. Create a calorie deficit of 250 to 500 calories per day through a combination of eating less and moving more. Nutrition experts recommend that an average person not drop below 1,200 to 1,500 calories per day. A slower rate of weight loss ensures fat and not muscle is lost. This will keep the dieter's energy level up and the weight down.

Saving Calories for a Large Meal Later in the Day

While it is true that creating an overall calorie deficit will result in weight loss, unfortunately, it is not a good strategy to bank calories. Going hungry during the day or during the week so that it is possible to splurge later typically leads to overeating. This disrupts the hormones responsible for regulating hunger. Eating a large meal at night may cause the dieter to not feel hungry in the morning, setting off a cycle of not eating in the morning and being ravenous by dinner time.

Instead, start off the day with a healthy breakfast, such as a scrambled egg with low-fat cheese on a whole-grain English muffin and an orange or a small bowl of berries. Then spread your calories out over the course of the day, eating a small meal or snack every three or four hours.

Weight Loss Goals are Short-Term

In other words, weight loss is thought of in terms of a diet and not a lifestyle. Dieting may result in short-term weight loss, but adopting healthier eating habits and staying within a calorie budget will translate to long-term weight maintenance. A successful diet plan is one that a person can stick with over the course of a lifetime, and not just for a few days, weeks or months.

Make a list of all the barriers that keep you from reaching your goal and tackle them one at a time. For example, if eating a big bowl of ice cream every night is your diet downfall, work toward cutting back to one

serving, and then enjoying that serving as a special treat on one night of the week. Once a healthy habit has been mastered, it is possible to move on to the next.

Not Considering Portion Size

Even the healthiest foods have calories. Whole grains, low-fat dairy, fruits and vegetables, mono and polyunsaturated fats and lean protein are all excellent choices for long-term weight loss. However, it is possible to eat healthily and still eat too much. For permanent weight loss, create a calorie deficit over time.

Measure portions. This is an excellent strategy for enjoying favorite foods while keeping calories in check. Keep a set of measuring cups, spoons and an inexpensive kitchen scale on hand to ensure a serving size is what actually constitutes a serving. If one serving of crackers equals 11 pieces, count out 11 pieces and put the rest away.

Measuring high-fat condiments, such as mayonnaise and salad dressing, is especially helpful.

Be sure to read food labels. Note that many items that appear to be one serving are actually two or three servings. With a little practice, it becomes possible to estimate servings of the foods.

Believing that Low-Fat Means Low-Calorie

Take the time to compare the calories of a low-fat item to its regular version. Often, the difference is minimal, if any. The item may have fewer calories from fat, but a closer look reveals that the fat has been replaced with sugar to preserve the taste. In addition, several research studies have shown that people tend to eat an average of 30 percent more of foods that are labeled “low-fat” than their full-fat counterparts.

Getting 20 to 35 percent of daily calories from heart-healthy fats (mono and polyunsaturated) helps keep a dieter full and provides long-lasting energy. Good sources of heart-healthy fat include nuts, avocados, olive oil and salmon.

Resources

- President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports: www.hhs.gov/fitness/index.html
- American Heart Association: www.heart.org
- National Institutes of Health: www.nih.gov
- National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases of the National Institutes of Health: www.niddk.nih.gov

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