[IMAGE]

Find Time for Fitness

By Chelsea Cooper

Summer is right around the corner, so if you're trying to shed anywhere from 10 to 20 pounds, read on. When establishing a summer fitness goal, some important things to keep in mind are: How much cardio and resistance training should I do? What eating and sleeping habits should I establish? And how should I manage my time? All of these things are important when trying to lose weight effectively and safely.

But before I go into too much detail, let's talk about a very important word that will make all the difference - *attitude*! Check your attitude and ask yourself if this is a good time to start your program. Examine your goals and make sure they're realistic and attainable. Most people who succeed at their weight-loss program have a "moment" in which they decide they want or need to change for themselves. The first thing you need to look at is your current exercise program (if any) and eating habits.

Cardiovascular training if you're trying to lose 10 pounds or less.

Let's talk about your cardiovascular activity, better known as "cardio." The daily recommended amount of cardio is at least 30 minutes every day. I recommend that four of those seven days you are doing 35-40 minutes at your target heart rate. (To calculate your THR, subtract your age from 220 and then multiply by 80.) Your cardio can be anything from running on a treadmill to biking, rollerblading or a jog around the block, just to name a few. Just keep your heart rate in the target zone and challenge yourself. Just remember to do something every day.

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark I know many women shy away from resistance training, but resistance training is probably one of the most effective ways to see results quicker, and it helps prevent osteoporosis and day-to-day injury. Resistance training increases your metabolism, which slows down as we age. Resistance training should be done two to three times a week. If you have no idea where to start, I suggest you inquire at a local gym or ask a fitness professional about some basic exercises. I also have a series of easy-to-follow exercises (ball squats, lunges, biceps curls, shoulder presses, calf raises and core training; reps and sets included) you can refer to for assistance (see below). Don't let not having a gym membership discourage you. You can do squats, abdominal crunches and push-ups anywhere. But I can't

emphasize enough the importance of getting assistance from your doctor or a certified fitness professional if you're not familiar with resistance training.

Now, let's talk about a fitness goal of 20 or more pounds of weight loss. If you're goal is to lose 20 or more pounds through the summer, you need to start doing something now! Not tomorrow or after the weekend - now. Every second counts. Make sure you set realistic goals because you want to lose the weight safely and effectively, and you *don't* want to gain your weight back, which you probably will do if you buy into some gimmick or get-fit-quick weight-loss system.

Cardiovascular training if you're trying to lose 20 pounds or more.

The components are the same as above: cardiovascular activity, resistance training and better eating habits. With cardio, you want to get 35-40 minutes of some activity every day. On five of the seven days, I recommend being in your THR for 35-40 minutes. Whether it's a brisk walk, biking or gardening, there are many activities that will help you burn calories. Obviously, if you have a gym membership or access to a cardio machine, treadmill, stair master, elliptical machine or spin class, this also will be very valuable. The other two days, you need to do some type of physical activity for 30 minutes. It might seem like a lot to start, but the key is doing more than you currently are and doing it consistently, progressing every week.

A young man at work with his bicycle leaning against his desk. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark
Resistance training is a key component many women try to avoid. But if you're trying to lose weight and see results quicker, resistance training is not an option - it's a *must*! Three to four days of resistance training are highly recommended. If you have never done any resistance training, please refer to a fitness professional to prevent injury. I recommend ball squats, leg presses, hamstring curls, push-ups, and lat and triceps pulldowns to get started.

You Are What You Eat

A middle aged couple at the gym. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Our last and most important component to shedding those pounds is your eating habits. First, I strongly recommend you keep a food journal; not for a lifetime, just for a couple of months. You need to write down everything you eat: calories, fat grams and carbohydrates. The more detailed you are, the better off you'll be. People tend to underestimate how many calories they consume in one day. A general guideline to lose weight safely and effectively is to consume anywhere from 1,350-1,750 calories per day.

Basically, if you start at the low end of the calorie range and are hungry all day long, then you need to up your calorie intake. Less is not always better when counting calories; your body is a machine, and it needs the right fuel to function properly. If you start going below 1,200 calories a day, your body will begin to slowly break down. Portion control also is very important. Just because you're eating "healthy" foods doesn't mean you can eat in excess. Any food in excess will be detrimental to your weight-loss goals.

Avoid high-fat food, chips, sodas and fried foods. Even a small reduction in these foods will go a long way. You want to try to eat lean meats (chicken, turkey and fish) and lots of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. If you feel you need more assistance and structure, consult with your doctor, a nutritionist or a weight-loss center.

A Few Other Things to Consider

We need to discuss time management, as you must take time to plan ahead. This often is an overlooked component when talking about food. If you plan out your snacks, lunches and dinners for the week, or at least for a couple of days, you will be ahead of the game. It takes about 10 minutes to plan and you will be set for the week. Lack of planning = bad decisions. Another thing to be aware of is your consumption of liquids. All liquids except for water have calories, so be aware and write down calories from soda, juices, alcohol, coffee, lattes, smoothies and other high-calorie drinks. Even though diet drinks have no calories, some studies have linked them with high food cravings.

A man running on a treadmill at a gym. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Sleep is another often overlooked part of losing weight and feeling better. If you're not getting at the very least seven hours of sleep, (eight to nine are recommended), you're fighting against yourself. Sleep correlates directly with your health, and if you're deciding to make some life changes such as exercising more and changing your eating habits, you need to make sure your body is well-rested and ready to work. Don't take my word for it; try it and you'll see and feel the difference.

You must exercise daily, whether it's that 30-minute brisk walk or resistance training, (yes, I recommend doing resistance training and cardio on the same day). Studies show that regular exercise increases health and longevity, while inactivity decreases health and shortens lifespan. Remember, consistency is the key, so get up and get going!

The information I have given you will work. The question is, will you do the work? The time and effort you put into your body will pay off either positively or negatively. It's not only about shedding those extra pounds to fit in those jeans or look good in your summer outfit. It's also about living a healthier, happier life.

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