

[IMAGE]

The Sensible, Simple Route to Slim

By Julie T. Chen, MD

When was the last time you tried to lose weight, whether 5 pounds, 15 pounds or a whole lot more? Were you successful in keeping the pounds off? If you were, congratulations. If not, you probably tried an extreme approach to improve your looks, rather than focusing on the bigger picture: your long-term health.

We've all heard the stories about how so-and-so knows someone who lost 15 pounds in one week. What we don't hear about is that the person probably resorted to extreme measures and dehydrated their body, as well as slowed down their metabolism, in the process.

In the long run, repeated episodes of unhealthy weight-loss attempts are more likely to cause damage to our body and outweigh the health benefits of short-term weight loss. Now don't get me wrong; I am not saying that it is better to stay at an unhealthy weight. We just have to make sure that we are losing weight in a healthy way and are able to maintain that weight loss. Most people who require repeated aggressive dieting are yo-yo dieting. Our bodies do not respond well to unhealthy attempts at deprivation followed by unhealthy excessive eating that gains the weight back because we feel deprived.

For example, visualize a plant that is left to dry until it is withering; then having gallons of water poured into its soil until it is overflowing. What tends to happen to these plants? They cannot survive even after the over-watering occurs. This is because living things require a steady stream of healthy nutrients, not extremes – the same dangerous cycle we sometimes put our bodies through to achieve weight loss.

slim waste - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark The key message to keep in mind when it comes to losing weight in a healthy way is to take the steps necessary to keep our metabolism humming, along with providing appropriate amounts of necessary nutrients and minerals for that to happen. How can we do that? Here are a few tips.

Burning Calories at Rest

In general, it is recommended that you not go below 1,200 calories per day (if you're an average-sized individual) so your metabolism doesn't slow down and you are able to maintain basic cellular and metabolic

functioning. If you want to be more exact, you can use the Mifflin formula (see sidebar on facing page) to calculate your resting metabolic rate (RMR; energy needed to produce vital body functioning at rest). Just keep in mind that if you exercise or are active, you are going to be burning more than this calculated amount on a daily basis. (The RMR designates what you need to function at rest.)

The equation at right sounds pretty complicated, so here's a quick example from the real world. If you're a 40-year-old woman, 5' 6," 140 pounds, then your resting metabolic rate would be approximately 1,300 (calories burned per day) if you're essentially sedentary (desk job; little or no daily exercise). It could be significantly more depending on how active you are.

Guess What? Healthy Weight Loss Takes Time (Sorry!)

It takes about a 500-calorie deficit per day to lose about 1 pound per week. If you incorporate exercise that burns an additional 500 calories per day, then you can lose 2 pounds per week. My recommendation would be to aim to lose no more than 2 pounds per week on average. "On average" takes into consideration that the initial weeks may result in greater weight loss because of the loss of retained fluids from exchanging fatty, salty foods for a healthier, more balanced diet. But overall, you should average out to about 2 pounds per week. If you are losing more than that, then you are more likely resorting to less-healthy methods of weight loss, which can hurt your metabolism and health in the long-term.

Believe it or not, people who lose weight at a slow, steady rate tend to keep the weight off longer because they are incorporating new, healthier habits instead of taking drastic measures to get the weight off. When we shift our focus from "dieting" to "creating a healthier lifestyle," we are more likely to succeed in keeping the weight off for good.

Water, Fiber and Green Tea

Make it a daily priority to stay hydrated with water and to incorporate vegetables and water into every meal. Portions do not need to be large, but by keeping these two ideas in mind, you will be less likely to become deficient in essential nutrients your body needs to function.

Remember to increase fiber in your diet, but at a rate that is slow and gradual. If you increase your fiber intake too quickly, you may bloat and become gaseous. Therefore, start to increase your dietary fiber (soluble and insoluble) gradually to about 20-30 grams per day.

These are rough estimates, but living life is not exact, so do the best you can at aiming for these numbers. Some people may tolerate a diet consisting of 35 grams per day, but some people may bloat and become gaseous at 20 grams per day. The key point is to just keep fiber in mind and increase it to a level that is comfortable for your body. Studies have shown that fiber helps with weight loss and makes you feel full (*satiety*). It's definitely something to keep in mind as you move forward in your goal of healthy weight loss.

Consider drinking green tea. I know some of you may not like the way it tastes, but there are different types of green tea. Green tea flavoring ranges from jasmine to genmaicha (green tea combined with roasted brown rice) to dragon well (hint of sweetness), just to name a few. Green tea has been shown in some clinical studies to have a beneficial impact on many aspects of health, including improvements in cholesterol, weight loss and weight maintenance. The healthy ingredients found in green tea include, but are not limited to, flavonoids, polyphenols and amino acids.

If you are sensitive to caffeine or have insomnia, they do come in decaffeinated versions. You can also decaffeinate the tea yourself. You can steep the tea bag in hot water for about 1 minute; then dump that water, because caffeine leaks out quickly. Then, use a new cup of hot water and steep the same tea bag in it for about 5-10 minutes to get the flavor with a fraction of the original caffeine.

apple with measuring tape - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Think Health First**

As you can see, there are simple steps that can help to ensure weight loss in a way that won't jeopardize your health. Although we all have different reasons for weight loss, and those reasons may change at different stages in our life, we should always remember that our goal should be inextricably linked to the goal of becoming *healthier*.

It's been suggested in studies that people who initiate weight loss for health reasons, rather than purely for aesthetic reasons, are more likely to achieve their weight loss goals and are more successful at maintaining weight loss. This may be due to the more extensive steps people take toward making lasting lifestyle changes when they are focused on weight loss for health reasons.

Ultimately, it's more important that you cross the finish line and achieve a healthy, fit lifestyle you can maintain, rather than losing a lot of weight quickly, but being unable to maintain the healthy weight because you took extreme measures to lose it. We all know that extreme measures cannot be maintained long-term.

That's why I always remind my patients that, when it comes to weight loss, slow and steady does win the race; in this case, it's much more important to be the tortoise than the hare.

slim man and woman - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **How many Calories Do You Burn?**

We don't mean when you're exercising; we mean while you're at rest. Your resting metabolic rate (RMR) is the rate at which your body uses energy during rest. The more calories you burn at rest, the more weight you can lose. Here's the equation:

For men:

$$(10 \times w) + (6.25 \times h) - (5 \times a) + 5$$

For women:

$$(10 \times w) + (6.25 \times h) - (5 \times a) - 161$$

Where w = weight in kg, h = height in cm, a = age in years

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