

NOT ANOTHER DIET!

Find out what it really takes to lose weight and keep it off...

Someone once said that “if diets worked there wouldn’t be so many of them.” I cannot agree more. People seem to be on a constant quest to lose weight, and yet obesity rates are growing exponentially. So what’s going on?

From my experience, I’ve seen a lot of people come in prepared with a list of reasons why they think they are not losing weight. They range from *I think I have a hormone problem, I don’t have time, I have a sweet tooth*, to even *I like to live!*

If you’ve heard (or used) any of the above excuses, you’re not alone. In spite of their obvious desire to lose weight, people’s eating habits do not usually reflect any of their weight loss efforts. This shows that although we are bombarded with messages about weight loss (magazines, books, television, etc.), we still lack the basic knowledge of how the body works.

There are a few basic rules that, if understood and applied correctly, can be key to permanent weight loss.

RULE #1 - If you take in more calories than you burn, you will gain weight

I often say that unless you’re going jogging, that piece of chocolate has nowhere to go other than your thighs. So it’s simple: either eat less, or exercise more!

RULE #2 - Sugar makes you fat

Any excess sugar in the diet is ‘empty calories’ and will be converted directly into fat. So stop eating sugar, or cut it down to twice a week only. Whatever you do, do not make sugar part of your daily routine.

RULE #3 - Stress makes you fat

When we are stressed, our body cannot tell the difference between physical or mental stress and it thinks that we need to run from an obvious stressor (e.g. lion). As a result, it releases sugar reserves in order to facilitate immediate action. The only problem is that we’re not really going to run, so we end up with extra sugar in the blood. This extra sugar is then put into fat stores. But reducing stress is often easier said than done, so stress management is the key. This differs from one person to another. For you it may mean exercising or swimming, for another it may mean yoga and music. Pick whatever stress management suits you and do it!

RULE #4 - Skipping meals is a big mistake.

Too often, people tend to skip a meal thinking they’ll lose weight as a result. If you understand how the body works, it will make more sense why you shouldn’t do that. Our bodies are made to survive; so when we are in a state of starvation (e.g. famine), our body will slow down completely in order to conserve energy. Metabolism and fat burning will slow down as well. If you skip a meal or tend to skip meals, your body will think that you don’t have access to food and will therefore slow down and burn less fuel over time. As a result, you may find that you’re eating less but not losing weight. If, however, you have small regular meals and snacks, then you’re telling your body that ‘it’s ok, you can burn it quickly, there’s more coming soon’.

RULE #5 - Breakfast IS the most important meal of the day

Research shows that people who do not eat breakfast have a harder time losing weight and keeping it off. Build a habit of having a healthy breakfast every morning.

RULE #6 - Exercise, Exercise, Exercise

Diet changes without exercise are useless. Exercise is important to burn calories, build muscle, and tone the body as it loses weight. If you don't like going to the gym or get bored of it after a while, then try getting into a sport such as tennis, swimming, dancing, ice skating, etc.

So why are people NOT losing weight?

When people come to me for weight loss, I often ask them to sign a weight loss contract. It is signed between that person and himself, with only one witness required. This contract shows commitment to the weight loss programme and it is also a way of saying 'I will get there, there's no turning back'.

What I find most interesting in this procedure is the hesitation involved. Immediately, I hear: *Can I sign it after the weekend? Can I sign it when my husband travels? Can I sign it at home?.*

Why is it that people are always worried they will 'stop living' if they're trying to lose weight? Shouldn't the 'I like to live' reason be the very incentive to lose weight and enjoy a healthy body?

Just ask yourself: do you WANT to lose weight, or would you LIKE to lose weight. The two are very different. If you 'would like to' lose weight 'one day', then you're wasting your time. On the other hand, people who 'want' to lose weight often get the best results. These are the people who come in willing to make a change, and are willing to be guided through a weight loss programme. Others, however, fall right back into their previous habits and continue to yo-yo, jumping from one diet to another, looking for quick solutions.

Take Action

In order to lose weight efficiently, you must not look at it as a quick-fix but as a long-term lifestyle change. Try the following:

- 1) **Stop being in denial.** If you think you need to lose weight, make a DECISION to do so. Hesitating will only waste your time, and every time you quit a diet, you will disappoint yourself further.
- 2) **Make a goal** that states how many kilograms you want to lose, and by what date. Please note that it is not healthy to lose more than half a kilogram per week in order to maintain weight loss.
- 3) **Analyse your diet.** Have an honest look at what you are eating. Take out the junk food, sugar, white products, and sweet drinks such as fizzy drinks and juices. Add more grains, protein and vegetables.
- 4) **Identify your weaknesses** and come up with a plan to overcome them. For many people, chocolate is the main weakness. If so, then plan for it by allowing yourself chocolate on certain days of the week. You must, however, plan exactly which days you'll have it and at what quantity; this reduces the chances of your chocolate cravings turning into 'binges'.
- 5) **Plan for relapses** (i.e. times when the diet plan will go out the window). Research shows that it is better to expect relapses and plan for them rather than completely give up when things go wrong. If you have a relapse plan, then bingeing incidents would be a one-off and you would wake up the next day back on track. Just make sure that relapses are not a common occurrence and that you immediately recognise them as a relapse (not a failure).
- 6) **Assess your efforts.** Weight yourself every three weeks, and ask yourself: where am I compared to where I want to be. Adjust your programme accordingly.

- 7) **Plan a reward system.** If you're doing well, treat yourself to a nice shirt, a massage, or anything that will make you feel good about yourself. Make sure the reward is not food!
- 8) **Don't fuss about your weight loss plan.** Try to incorporate it into your life, rather than cater your life around it. If you must stop your life to lose weight, then you never will.
- 9) If necessary, **get the help of a professional** (e.g. doctor, dietician, nutritionist). For some people, it is easier to lose weight if the programme is laid out, regularly monitored and adjusted. Motivation is also a big part of losing weight, so finding inspiration, a helpful professional, or a weight loss group can help.

If all your weight loss efforts are failing, then you should consult a health care professional. In these cases, it may be helpful to check your hormone levels, thyroid function, or any other possible underlying condition.

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