

Weight Loss - Diet vs Exercise?

Many people wonder “what is the best way to lose weight?” and the question will often come down to a single binary division - is it best to focus on diet or exercise? We actually do have an answer to this question: one can safely assume that 80-90% of effective weight loss is the result of proper eating habits and nutritional awareness and only 10-20% is the result of exercise itself.

Weight loss is a common concern for many patients. Naturally we want our advice to not only be effective but completely safe as well.

Here are my thoughts and pearls of wisdom as they pertain to losing weight:

1. Keep a food diary:

Believe it or not, the food diary itself is an extremely effective way of losing weight. Studies have shown that investing 5-10 minutes per day in tracking and monitoring what you eat is more effective in achieving weight loss than daily exercise.

Keeping a food log or diary simply involves monitoring what you are eating and logging it. There are very user friendly food diaries available - such as “My Fitness Pal” which is available online or on smartphone devices and the FitBit software also includes its own intrinsic option for keeping a food diary.

When we keep a food diary, we become more aware and cognizant of what we eat. As a result we become more accountable and tend to make better choices and subsequently develop better nutrition habits.

2. Cook/Prepare your own food:

Eating out nowadays can be quite healthy but it’s still not a substitute for cooking your own food. By far and large the best way to ensure you are eating well and limiting the amount of ‘junk’ added to your food is by making it yourself in your own home.

When we prepare and cook our own meals, we are much less likely to add unnecessary ingredients such as excessive fats, seasonings or sugars as restaurants may do to improve tastes and satisfaction with meals.

3. Eat breakfast everyday:

Eating breakfast daily has shown to improve satiety. This means that eating a nutritious breakfast, usually within an hour of waking, will more likely curb and moderate your hunger throughout the day.

Several studies have shown that eating breakfast on a daily basis is one of the strongest factors in maintaining weight and not overeating.

4. Avoid diets and extremes:

If we've learned anything in the last few decades, it's definitely that easy-fix and quick weight loss plans and diets definitely do not work. Most of these fad diets have been shown to effectively decrease weight for only a short time. A large percentage of people will almost invariably relapse and return to old dietary habits and regain their weight, if not more.

Also be careful not to listen to bizarre and conspiracy-based dietary advice via social media. I'm amazed how misinformed people can be through Facebook and different TV programs - both of which often promote poor nutritional advice and evidence-lacking diets.

Use common sense and avoid extremes.

Weight loss is a challenge for many, but also an important medical plan for the majority. It's always ideal to optimize weight and ensure that your nutrition is optimized. If you're ever looking for sound advice, consider speaking to your local dietitian or family physician - both can provide you with great ideas on how best to approach weight loss. If you're looking for a good book, try picking up "The Diet Fix" by Dr. Yoni Freedhoff (MD, Family Physician) - an excellent read with sound advice.

Best of luck and enjoy the pursuit!