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WEIGHT LOSS THAT WORKS

BY MICHELLE GIBEAULT TRAUB

Maintaining a healthy weight is a struggle for millions of Americans. Obesity rates are rising, with over 39 percent of adults in that category. While a little extra weight may not seem like a big deal, those additional pounds increase the risk for life-threatening conditions like heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some forms of cancer. For a long, healthy life, it is important to tackle weight gain head-on when the numbers on the scale start to climb.

As tempting as it is to turn to the latest diet to slim down quickly, be warned: diets that focus on eliminating food groups and severely restricting calories are difficult to follow long-term. For weight loss to last, you must make healthy changes in your

eating, and find daily activities you can stick to for life.

That's not to say that diets are inherently dangerous. They can be excellent tools in getting your weight on track. Every year, *U.S. News & World Report*, with a panel of health experts, ranks the most popular diets. In recent years, three have topped the list: the Mediterranean, the DASH and the Flexitarian. All of them emphasize filling your plate with fruits and vegetables. They also limit saturated fat by reducing portions of red meat and full-fat dairy, and avoiding the empty calories of sugary treats.

Casey Calkins, a registered dietitian in West Hartford, Conn., supports that advice. When counseling clients, she suggests they eat plant foods, "as many different kinds, colors and preparation styles as possible." Plant-based foods include not only produce, but protein-rich beans, legumes, nuts, seeds and soy foods, which are rich in fiber, low in fats, filling and versatile.

Another weight-management

tip is to avoid sugar-sweetened beverages. The World Health Organization (WHO) and many other public-health agencies have warned against the role sugary beverages play in the obesity epidemic. When you consider that a 20-ounce bottle of soda contains 250 calories, while coffee-shop drinks can top off at 500 calories, it's easy to see how quickly drinking your calories adds up. Replacing sugar-sweetened drinks with no-calorie options like water, seltzer, unsweetened green tea or black coffee saves calories over the course of the day. In addition, studies indicate that drinking water before meals helps curb the appetite and assists in weight loss.

Sugar in all its forms can derail dieting efforts. Processed, packaged foods like cake, cookies and candy cause the blood sugar to rise quickly and then crash, leading to hunger. Since these foods lack the filling benefits of fiber or protein, they

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make you hungry for more. Reading labels and avoiding foods with added sugars will help you make healthier choices. Additionally, snacking on low-sugar fruits like berries and watermelon is one way to help curb a sweet tooth.

Food is often the focus in weight loss, but physical activity is also essential. The body loses muscle as we age, and thus burns calories at a lower rate. This contributes to the seemingly inevitable climb in weight as we get older. The best way to counter this decline in metabolism is by building and maintaining muscle. Basic exercises like squats, lunges and pushups use your own body weight as resistance to effectively gain strength. Working with a personal trainer or physical therapist can help you create a daily exercise routine that's safe.

A final component of weight loss is emotional support. Noting that food is often used to cope with sadness, stress, anxiety or loneliness, Calkins helps clients find different outlets – hobbies like knitting or writing, or calling a friend to talk or take a walk – to help defuse the emotions that lead to overconsumption. Weight-loss support groups, even those offered online, can also be effective in encouraging and maintaining healthy eating patterns. Losing weight is not easy, but the health benefits are worth the efforts.

Michelle Gibeault Traub is a dietitian and health writer based in Connecticut.



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Peak times for heart attacks

A new study published by the *BMJ* reveals that certain days of the week, times of the year and even times of day correlate with a higher frequency of heart attacks.

As MarketWatch reports, the study examined 283,014 heart attacks over a multiyear period and “found that the risk of a potentially fatal heart attack peaks by 37 percent at around 10 p.m. on Christmas Eve.” The study also reveals that risk of heart attack was higher during New Year’s celebrations, summertime vacations and at 8 a.m. Monday mornings. Stock-market crashes, sporting events and severe weather, too, were associated with a higher heart-attack risk.

The study’s authors cautioned that it is an observational study and “did not draw firm conclusions about cause and effect. That is, the results suggest correlation rather than causation, and they cannot rule out other variables that may contribute to this increased health crisis.”

Even so, many, if not all, of the days/times cited in the study are high- or higher-than-normal stress events, underscoring the importance of stress management and recognition of stress triggers.

Gastric bypass and diabetes

Gastric bypass weight-loss surgery can help obese people who struggle with diabetes-related issues in the short-term, WebMD reports, citing a research study of 120 patients with type 2 diabetes. However, the patients’ ability to control blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels diminished over time.

“We found that adding gastric bypass did provide significant benefit at five years after surgery,” said study author Charles Billington of the University of Minnesota. “But the size of the benefit declined substantially from the first to the fifth year.”

Fifty percent of the participants who had weight-loss surgery reached targeted blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels associated with diabetes control, but after five years only 23 percent hit the targeted levels.

By comparison, 16 percent of the 60 study participants who did not have weight-loss surgery met the three diabetes control targets after a year. That fell to 4 percent after five years.

Moreover, Billington said benefits of the surgery “may not be large enough to warrant the adverse events” associated with the surgery, including bowel obstructions and leaks.



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