

Losing Weight for Better Health

Forget about the grapefruit diet, the 48-hour juice fast and the apple-cider vinegar. There is no miracle cure, no magic bullet. The only way to lose weight and keep it off is to eat less and move more.

In fact, stop using the word “diet” at all. A “diet” implies that you’ll go off at some point. That’s why 95 percent of dieters eventually gain back all of the weight they’ve lost. Instead, try to make positive, realistic changes in your lifestyle that you can stick with.

Why should you worry about your weight? According to the U.S. Surgeon General, obesity in Americans may soon cause as much preventable disease and death as cigarette smoking. As many as 300,000 deaths a year are linked to excessive weight, compared with about 430,000 from smoking. Since 1980, the number of obese adults has nearly doubled, and the percentage of adolescents considered overweight has nearly tripled.

Get moving

Joining a gym and working with a personal trainer is a great way to get in shape. Gyms today are responding to concerns about aging and injuries, and a desire for overall health as well as fitness. They now focus on preventive-exercise classes, such as core training, which strengthens the abdominal muscles and back and builds flexibility. Martial arts and yoga have been added to the mix of aerobics and weight training. Gyms also offer hybrid classes that combine cardio and stretching or cardio and weights.

If you can’t visit the gym three times a week, add more physical activity to your day by walking instead of taking a car, a bus or a taxi, or using a cart on the golf course. Enjoy a stroll in the park with your kids.

According to a survey, 70 percent of respondents said that outdoor leisure activities are more effective in reducing personal stress than indoor activities. Seventy-five percent said that spending time outdoors is a good way to build family relationships.

Some fitness experts believe that walking may be the “perfect exercise.” It’s safe and easier on the knees than running. Walking also reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis and diabetes.

In *Time* magazine, Dr. JoAnn Manson, chief of preventive medicine at Harvard’s Brigham and Women’s Hospital, said that regular exercise is probably as close to a “magic bullet” as we will ever get in modern medicine. She said that if everyone in the United States were to walk briskly for 30 minutes a day, the incidence of many chronic diseases could be cut 30 percent to 40 percent.

Don’t forget the H₂O

About 75 percent of Americans don’t drink enough water—at least eight glasses a day. In fact, hunger is often a sign that we need water, which improves digestion and metabolism. It also reduces

constipation and the risk of kidney stones and cancers. So, the next time you feel the urge for a fatty snack, drink a glass of water instead.

Get the kids involved

A report by the U.S. Surgeon General stated that nearly 13 percent of children and adolescents are considered obese or overweight. So, make fitness a family affair and include the kids.

On average, elementary-age children should spend at least 60 minutes every day in moderate physical activity. Middle-schoolers should get at least 30 minutes. So, how about a walk or a bike ride with the kids after work? Or a game of basketball or catch? If your kids spend too much time in front of the TV or their computers, this could be an opportunity for you to spend some quality time with them—and stay in shape.

Get your kids moving

- Designate indoor and outdoor play areas where rolling, climbing, jumping and tumbling are allowed.
- Buy fitness-oriented toys and gifts.
- Emphasize everyday activities that are fun, such as biking, swimming, raking leaves, walking in the park or flying a kite.
- Use physical activity, like a family bike trip, rather than food as a reward.

Resources

Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal by Eric Schlosser. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001.

The Take Control Diet: A Life Plan for Thinking People by Dr. Ian K. Smith. Random House, 2001.

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