

# **Lose Weight Now!**

## **Your Guide to Sustained Weight Loss**

There can be little doubt that weight is a preoccupation of many Americans. Bookstores are filled with diet books...the Internet sports a myriad of weight loss solutions...and gyms are filled with people hoping to shed a few pounds. In some cases, weight can become an obsession, leading to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. However, if you are overweight, there are healthy ways to become more physically fit. Still, it can take a great deal of time trying to sift through various diet plans and exercise regimes.

We've done the research for you. Here, you will find the latest information about successful weight loss strategies. We evaluate various methods, offering you the pros and cons. We take a look at various reasons for obesity and ways to combat them. After reviewing this material, you should have a better understanding of the root causes of weight gain and common sense approaches to better manage one's weight.

### **Thinking Like a Thin Person**

Your struggle with weight might have begun while you were a child, as you attempted to find out just how many cookies you could eat at one sitting. Or it might have occurred shortly after you arrived on a college campus for the first time. Those late nights of studying might have led to late-night bingeing sessions. Or you might have gained weight after the birth of your first child, and have been unable to shed the weight ever since. No matter what the cause, weight gain is a serious matter. It can affect your energy level, your stamina, and your overall health. Obesity has been linked to a number of diseases, including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

Once you determine that you are overweight, you have to make a commitment to bring your weight under control. This can be a daunting venture. You have turned overeating into a habit, and reversing that habit can be difficult. In essence, you have taught yourself to "think like a fat person." In order to reverse this trend, you need to learn to think like a thin person.

What exactly does this mean? To begin with, it means that you must throw away your preconceived ideas about food and eating. Eating might have become a social event for you. As a result, you'll need to learn to be sociable without food. This is similar to the struggle that alcoholics face when they must learn to socialize without beer or liquor. Just because this is hard lesson to learn doesn't mean you shouldn't try.

Thinking like a thin person also means that you need to develop new coping strategies. You might be viewing food as your friend, the one you turn to when things are not going your way. You may even be eating in secret because you're ashamed at

how much you're eating. You need to realize that your public persona needs to be the same as your private persona—and your diet should match both.

A number of thin people exercise without even noticing it. Activity has become a normal part of their day. The same thing needs to be true of you. You need to exercise as much as possible. It should ultimately become second nature for you. It should not be a chore—it should be a fun part of your week. Take an inventory of your preferences. Whether you like tennis or bowling, badminton or running, choose the activity that best represents your style. Then exercise diligently—preferably six times a week. This will speed up your metabolism so that you will burn fat more quickly. Also, you need to overcome any fear you have of exercising. As an overweight person, you might find exercise frustrating—and you might fear what other people will think of you as they watch you exercising. You need to realize that chances are no one cares about your exercise routine. Don't let fear get in the way of your progress.

Thinking thin also means controlling portion sizes. This can be difficult, especially when eating out. However, the key to effective weight loss often lies in limiting your food intake, and that begins with portion control. You might try putting your dinner on a smaller plate in order to ensure that your portion sizes are not too large.

You have to realize that thinking as a thin person does not happen overnight. You have had years to develop your thought patterns and changing them can be a challenge. The important thing to remember is to take one day at a time and keep in mind that your weight loss will not happen instantaneously. It will take months of hard work to reach your ideal weight. However, the good news is that once you get into the habit of thinking thin, it's a trait you can carry with you for life. The difference between a fat person and a thin person is not just a matter of the body, but of the mind as well. Once you realize that, you will be well on your way to accomplishing your weight loss goals, both your immediate goals and your future goals.

## **Learning to Say No—The Secret to Weight Loss**

From the time you were a child, you might have been a people pleaser. You tried to ace your schoolwork in order to win your parents' approval...you practiced soccer for hours on end to win a vote of support from your coach...or you diligently practiced your piano chords in order to earn the gratitude of your music teacher. There's nothing wrong with aiming to please. It can make you a respected leader, a valued friend, a comforting mentor. However, it should be recognized that some food addictions begin with an inability to say "no."

It might have begun with a Thanksgiving during your childhood when your mother asked if you wanted a second helping of mashed potatoes. Or a teacher at your elementary school might have given you a gold star if you cleaned your plate. You were probably taught that it is wrong to waste food and that a hearty appetite was a good thing.

The problem is, such cues from your environment might have caused you to learn the wrong lessons when it came to food consumption.

In our society, many people have difficulty saying “no.” They want to be part of the crowd and they don’t want to stand out for non-participation. They will do all they can to blend in and that leads them to say “yes” more times than they’d like to. In fact, the epidemic of alcohol and drug abuse may be due in part to the refusal of many people to say “no.”

Admitting that you have a problem overcommitting yourself is the first step to progress. It shows that you have a great deal of insight into your own problems with food and you want to change your bad habits and replace them with admirable ones. But this can be difficult, given the fact that so many families have a number of rituals involving food. Also, unlike cigarettes or marijuana, food is not considered inherently bad—nor should it be. However, you need to learn how to use food effectively.

Part of your training begins with learning the power of “no” or “no thank you.” You need to learn to assert yourself, to recognize that you do not have to go along in order to get along. You realize that you are doing yourself no favors by accepting extra helpings of pasta—in fact, you could be doing your body a great deal of harm. The key now is to do something about it.

What’s the best way to undergo assertiveness training? One method you can use is role-playing. Practice saying “no” to extra servings with the help of a friend playing the role of adversary. In this “pretend” situation, you may feel more comfortable saying “no.” You will also learn that saying “no” isn’t the end of the world; that you will not automatically lose friends by taking a “negative” stance.

Another trick you might use is making sure that you do not slouch while sitting at the table for your meals. Slouching indicates defeat—a belief that a situation is hopeless. With your head held high you will gain the confidence you need to say “no”—and to mean it.

Yet another effective strategy is to keep a journal recording your thoughts after you’ve said “no”—either to more food or to a commitment you just can’t handle at this time. Putting your feelings in writing can be quite cathartic. It can also help you with problem-solving, enabling you to figure out ways that you can say “no” without hurting another person’s feelings.

Something else you will need to learn is that it is not necessary for you to fulfill another person’s expectations. In other words, whether your Aunt Mary thinks you’re eating enough really doesn’t matter. If you recognize that you are overweight, Aunt Mary’s opinion shouldn’t be taken into account. You must do what you think is best in order to take control of your eating. Assertiveness will not happen immediately. But, with practice, you can learn to say “no” like a pro. And you—and your waistline—will be better off as a result of what you’ve learned.

## **Mind Over Matter: Key Strategies for Weight Loss Success**

Katie, a 33-year-old mother of two, has been on her share of diets over the years. From Weight Watchers to the Zone to Sugar Busters, she feels as if she has tried them all. While she has had moderate success in losing weight from time to time, she has never found a long-term weight loss solution. Her weight is a point of contention in her marriage; her husband—who also happens to be obese—wishes she were thin, but says he loves her anyway. The two have been separated a number of times, and even filed for divorce once. The stress has caused Katie to begin binge eating again.

There is hope for Katie and others like her who feel as if they're trapped on the diet carousel. The key to long-term weight loss success may not be the body, but the mind. Research indicates that those who have a positive outlook on life are more likely to lose weight—and stay thin. But how can you have a positive outlook when you've been burned so many times before? Is it possible to “will your way” to losing weight?

One technique that has been proven effective in sports training is something called visualization. For instance, a baseball player might visualize his bat connecting with a ball, leading to a homerun. A soccer player might visualize kicking the winning goal in a soccer match. And a golfer might visualize sinking the winning putt in the Masters Tournament.

The same technique can be used by dieters. Visualize yourself as thin. Picture yourself in that dress that is now two sizes too small. Imagine stepping onto the scale and being pleased with the result. Visualize yourself saying “no” to that piece of chocolate cake or that plate of Fettucini Alfredo. These mind exercises can help to spur you onto weight loss.

When people learn they are suffering from cancer, they are encouraged to imagine their cancer cells being destroyed by healthy cells. You can follow the same technique in order to lose weight. That means imagining your fat cells being destroyed by thin cells. Through such a method, you can “think your way” to a healthy weight.

In addition, it is critically important that you maintain a positive attitude. Be forgiving of yourself. If you veer off your diet plan, simply get back on course with your next meal. Don't spend precious time “beating yourself up” over your failures. Instead, celebrate your successes—in a non-fattening way. For instance, when you reach a milestone—say you've lost ten pounds—reward yourself with a trip to an art museum or to your favorite coffee shop (but skip the cream and sugar). Marking milestones will give you a sense of accomplishment, a sense that you are triumphing over food.

Another helpful technique can be prayer or meditation. Some support groups even offer Bible-based weight loss programs that use scripture verses to help inspire. Taking stock of your life and handing your weight loss problems over to a higher power can be

cathartic and may give you a sense of peace about your weight difficulties. It has been said that a clear head leads to a healthy body. Try praying or meditating ten minutes at the start of your day. Chances are you will feel refreshed and ready to tackle the weight challenges that come your way.

Yet another technique you might consider is role-playing. Grab your spouse or a friend and ask him or her to act out a situation in which you might be tempted to overeat. You'll be forced to come up with strategies to fight temptation. This rehearsal could prove to be quite helpful when a real life diet dilemma comes your way. If role-playing works for job interviews, it should be beneficial for your weight as well.

Mind over matter is not just a clever saying. It can actually be the solution to your weight loss problems. By using your brain power, you can develop the techniques needed to make healthy food choices. When your mind and your body are both healthy, you have the best of both worlds.

## **The Psychology of Weight Loss**

You see the razor-thin models gracing the covers of magazines...you watch actors and actresses on the big screen who seem to never gain a pound. And you wonder: How do I differ from them? You may be surprised to learn that a number of famous people at one time had difficulty maintaining a healthy weight. But they were able to conquer their problem, thanks to a new-and-improved, healthy view of eating.

You may not realize it, but there is a certain psychology at work in successful weight loss. It is no surprise, then, that the magazine *Psychology Today* has explored the issue in-depth. In October of 2004, the magazine posted an article on its website detailing the experiences of Diane Berry, a nurse practitioner who studied women who had shed at least 15 pounds and had maintained their weight loss for an average of seven years.

The women shared some important things in common. For instance, they all achieved their weight loss through either *Weight Watchers* or *TOPS*, which meant that they had a firm support network as they tried to maintain their weight. The group meetings were highly important, because they learned to recognize that they were certainly not alone in their struggles with weight. The women were also quite unusual because up to 90 percent of individuals who have lost weight end up putting it back on within five years.

Another common trait of these women is that they appeared to undergo a profound mood shift as they made the transition from fat to thin. From all indications, they appeared to be depressed when they were heavy but, as they attempted to lose weight, their mood brightened.

For these women, healthy eating became a habit—a habit they refused to break. They themselves recognized the tremendous role that psychology plays in weight loss.

They refused to give in to negative feelings of frustration and denial and chose a positive path instead. The women also made it a point to weigh themselves regularly so that they could chart their progress.

And they recognized that maintaining weight loss would be a lifetime struggle. They knew that they could not attempt a weight loss program then put it back on the shelf. They had to learn new eating patterns that they could continue week in and week out. In some cases, they likened their struggle to that of an alcoholic. In other words, they recognized the gravity of their problem and took steps to correct the situation.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these women's experiences was the fact that their weight loss actually came in spurts. At times, they regained their weight, but they did not let that deter them from their final goal. They simply viewed their setbacks as challenges that they needed to overcome. This may be the key psychological trait that separates successful dieters from unsuccessful ones—perseverance. In essence, these women were able to change their personalities in a positive way in order to achieve their long-term weight loss goals.

Another interesting aspect of this study was that it showed that the women who had undergone weight loss transformation were genuinely happy. This shows the tremendous psychological impact that weight loss can have on an individual. Once an individual is free from the burden of extra weight, he or she is better able to meet the challenges of life head-on. The dieter benefits from positive reinforcement, as relatives, friends, and co-workers congratulate him or her for the weight loss. In this way, losing weight can be quite a life-affirming experience and can lead to a more optimistic outlook on life.

It must be noted here that the psychology of weight loss is a complicated matter. There is no single ingredient that can turn a fat person into a thin one. However, recognizing that there is a psychological component to successful weight loss may, in fact, be half the battle. Once an individual recognizes that he or she is engaged in a psychological fight, he or she is better able to do battle. By retraining oneself to seek healthy approaches to diet, one can, in effect, mold oneself into a new individual—one that no longer lives to eat, but simply eats to live.

## **The Food Diary: The “Write” Way to Lose Weight**

As a child, you may have kept a diary to record your daily activities, your hopes, and your fears. If you wrote in the diary each day, it might have seemed as if the diary itself had become one of your best friends. As you grew older, the diary might have become a record of your job search, love life, or wedding plans. Psychologists, in fact, tell us that writing down your goals can be the first step to achieving them. It has been demonstrated that individuals who kept a written record of their hunt for employment were more likely to find the job they wanted than those who did not.

It's not surprising, then, that some dieticians recommend keeping a food diary or journal if you're hoping to lose weight. If you're not accustomed to writing, the idea can seem a bit daunting at first. After all, if you don't seem to have the time to record all of your baby's "firsts"—the first words, the first steps, the first day of reciting the alphabet—how can you be expected to find the time to write down everything that passes through your lips? It's a valid question; however, if you stop to consider just how much time you spend eating, surely you can find the time to write down what you eat.

The key to keeping a food diary is motivation. You have to have a desire to record your food choices. One good way to do this is to place a picture of your heaviest self onto the cover of a notebook. Also, make sure that you keep the notebook in full view, either on your bedside table or on the kitchen table. This could provide you with just the incentive you need to make note of what you're eating. Another motivating factor could be to log your daily weight at the beginning of each diary entry. That way, you can see if your dietary choices are having an effect on your weight. If you find that you are shedding pounds, you can affix a gold star next to your entry. The gold star can provide the psychological boost necessary to continue to lose weight.

Of course, the next question you'll face is: What exactly should I write down for each entry? To begin with, just include a running list of foods, along with portion sizes. You might be surprised to find out not only what you're eating, but also how large the portions are. Next, categorize each food entry. Is it a fruit, vegetable, whole grain, or fat? Such information could be vitally important in determining where your excess pounds are coming from.

You can also use your journal for meal planning. If you think about what you should eat ahead of time, you'll be less likely to indulge in the wrong foods. Such planning can make you feel more organized and more in control—two important elements for losing weight.

If you indulge in comfort food every once in a while, don't panic. Eating high-calorie foods occasionally can help prevent a feeling of deprivation which can lead to overeating. The key is to eat "bad foods" in moderation. It is also important that you write down everything you eat, including fatty foods. Trying to hide your food choices by not writing them down is counter-productive and could lead to feelings of guilt.

Yet another helpful idea is to write down your goal weight each day. This can be an important element of psychological warfare. Knowing what your goal is—and mapping out a way to get there—can improve your chances of achieving critical milestones.

Also, when possible, try to make your diary experience fun. Do your writing on the patio, by the pool, or in your bathtub. Set the mood by playing some of your favorite music in the background. Decorate your diary by using colored pens or colorful stickers. Whatever you can do to make your diary-keeping chores more interesting will certainly be helpful.

Be aware of the fact that it could take you a while to get into the diary-keeping habit. But, once you see those pounds melt away, you'll find it's well worth the investment of time and energy.

## **Emotional Eating: A Prime Ingredient for Obesity**

Sandra found her weight ballooning 60 pounds after her separation from her husband. While part of the weight gain was apparently tied to the medication she was taking, the rest appeared to be the result of what can be described as emotional eating. In recent years, greater attention has been focused on the problem of emotional eating for both women and men. In fact, some experts have gone so far as to claim that most weight gain can be blamed on emotional eating. According to Women Today magazine, it has been estimated that as much as 75 percent of overeating is attributed to the emotions.

For a number of people, overeating stems from anxiety. For instance, if you find yourself consuming an entire bag of potato chips, it's possible that anxiety is the cause. While many people realize that alcohol and illegal drugs are not an antidote to anxiety, they may not understand that indulging in comfort food in order to combat anxiety can be dangerous as well.

In other cases, overeating may be the result of depression. If you feel tired, hopeless, and have lost interest in your normal activities, you may be suffering from a depressive episode. In order to deal with these uncomfortable feelings, people may turn to food in an effort to cheer up. The problem is that the food can lead to weight gain, which can lead to further depression.

At times, overeating may be a symptom of boredom. An individual may figure that he or she has nothing better to do than overeat. This can be particularly true when one is watching television or surfing the Internet. Rather than trying to determine a cause for the boredom, an individual may just try to "fix" it by indulging in high-fat, high-calorie food.

How do you know if you are an emotional eater? Ask yourself some key questions: Do I tend to eat when I'm worried? Scared? Sad? Do I find that eating lifts my spirits? Am I spending more time eating than engaging in other activities I enjoy? Do my binges come after I've suffered disappointment? Am I turning to food in order to deal with the death of a loved one...a divorce...or the defeat of my favorite team? If the answers to any of these questions is "yes," you may be overeating purely for emotional reasons.

After you've identified yourself as an emotional eater, you'll need to take steps to correct your behavior. Perhaps the most effective technique is diversion. In other words, if you find yourself reaching for the cookie jar, find another activity to engage in. The answer could be taking a walk, kickboxing, or dancing. Or it could be something less

physically demanding, such as needlepoint or crochet. The idea is to get your hands...and perhaps the rest of your body...moving. In time, you might find the urge to overeat subsides as you become involved with other activities.

Another effective step you can take is to identify the triggers for your emotional eating. Do you tend to binge in mid-morning, mid-afternoon, or right before bedtime? Are you snacking while watching television, while at the computer, or when you're sitting in your favorite chair? By asking yourself these questions, you can identify the time of day when you overeat, as well as the location for your bingeing. With this information, you can learn to re-direct your behavior to less fattening pursuits.

Yet another helpful technique is to develop a support network to help you combat overeating. The members of your support team could include your spouse, children, parents, friends, or other over-eaters. You may even consider joining a support group which specializes in helping those who engage in binge eating. If you feel the need to overeat, contact a member of your support team. Talking through your emotions could provide you with the emotional release you need, making overeating unnecessary.

If your anxiety or depression persists, consider seeing a psychotherapist. He or she can help you develop more effective coping mechanisms. If you find it difficult to talk to friends or family about your overeating, a psychotherapist can provide you with the talk therapy you need to overcome your problem.

## **Taking Stock of Yourself**

Before you go out to search for a job, you probably take stock of yourself. This means assessing your talents and abilities, your personal preferences, and your social skills. Once you've completed your personal inventory, you are ready to look for the job of your dreams.

The same sort of plan of action can help you as you begin your weight loss program. You'll need to do a little research on yourself. You'll need to write down things about your activities, goals, interests, and try to combine them into a workable diet and exercise routine.

It can be difficult—sometimes painful—to conduct such a self-evaluation. But it can be quite beneficial for your long-term health. Before beginning a weight loss program, you need to ask yourself some questions. In some cases, they may be hard questions. But they will help to ensure the success of your weight loss regimen.

The National Institutes of Health have said that obesity is the second leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. This means that your personal inventory has life-or-death consequences. This means that you'll need to be brutally honest with yourself. Otherwise, your health could suffer in the long run.

A number of diets take a cookie-cutter approach. As a result, you may follow them for a time, but then tire of them. That is why it is so critically important to have a personalized weight loss plan. This may mean that, once you conduct your inventory, you'll need to consult a registered dietician to find the diet that's right for you.

In your inventory, determine how you are currently doing, as far as diet and exercise are concerned. You might consider giving yourself a grade of excellent, satisfactory, or needs improvement. Determine how many years you have been overweight and note whether you are constantly on a diet. Also, make note of whether you tend to gain back weight once you've lost it. Then, determine what your weight loss goal is. Remember that a realistic goal is to lose about two pounds a week. Finally, determine how best you can reach your goal.

You may also want to take a family history. This is important when you go to a doctor, and it's also critical when you go to see a dietician. Note whether any members of your family are overweight. Do you have a family history of heart attack? Diabetes? Cancer? Osteoporosis? What is your Body Mass Index? Is it where you would like it to be? What is your cholesterol level? Is it considered to be dangerous by your doctor? What is your blood pressure? Could it be improved? Are you under a great deal of stress? Do you generally follow good health habits? The answers to these questions can help determine your personal health risks.

You'll also want to determine how much physical activity you engage in. For instance, does your job require you to bicycle or run? Do you currently take part in at least 30 minutes of exercise several days a week? Do you engage in stretching exercises? Do you lift weights? Are you involved in sports? Do you use exercise as a means of relaxation? Do you dance in order to have a good time? Again, the answers to these questions will help to determine your current physical activity level and what you need to do in the future in order to increase your activity.

Granted, your personal inventory could leave you a bit demoralized. After all, you may not be eating the way you should. Your family might have a history of disease and obesity, and you may not be doing as much exercising as you should. The idea of the personal inventory is not to make you depressed. Rather, it's simply information that you can use as you try to plot your roadmap to weight loss success.

You might consider taking your personal inventory from time to time. That way, you can see how much progress you're making. Such progress could inspire you to set new goals for both diet and exercise. Keep in mind that you're never too old to learn something new about yourself. The key is to take that knowledge and use it for effective action.

## **Staying Motivated: An Important Factor in Weight Loss**

If you are attempting to fight fat, it is simply not enough to begin an exercise program. You must also be able to stick with it. This can be challenging, especially if you have spent most of your life as a couch potato. You may find exercise to be boring or a chore. And you may be wondering whether your exercise program is really worth the effort.

It should be noted that the key to a successful exercise program is perseverance. This means that you need to commit to it for the long haul—in fact, it is best if you commit to it for the rest of your life. Certainly, it can be difficult at times. But in the end, it is well worth the effort you exert.

Staying motivated may begin with having a tangible goal. For instance, if you are basically inactive when you start your program, you should aim to burn off 500 calories a week. If you are fairly active when you start exercising, your goal should be 1,000 calories. But you must also have a long-term goal. This might be doubling the amount of calories you burn within six months of commencing your exercise program.

You might consider starting an exercise log. Here, you will record exactly what kind of aerobic, anaerobic, and stretching exercises you do each week. Be sure to include the number of repetitions you're performing with each exercise. This way, you'll have a concrete chart for your progress. Seeing how well you're doing can be truly inspiring and can keep you going when you find it difficult to go on.

Another effective motivational strategy is to join a group that engages in some kind of exercise. For instance, you might become a mall-walker or you might find a local square dance club to join. Other possibilities include hiking groups, golfing groups, softball teams, or even ping-pong teams. The fact that you are part of a social network will help to keep you motivated.

You might try psyching yourself out by using a computer screensaver which says, "Get moving." Or you might post a "get moving" sign on your refrigerator. In other words, you should be constantly reminded of the value of exercise. You might also invest in home exercise equipment such as a treadmill, elliptical trainer, or free weights. The amount of money you spend could be a powerful incentive for making sure that you use the equipment on a regular basis. You should also place the equipment in a prominent place so that you have to pass it often. After a while, you'll find no excuse not to exercise.

You might also consider investing in exercise videos or DVDs. These allow you the convenience of exercising in the privacy of your own home. They can also give you an electronic "exercise buddy" who can help keep you inspired even on rainy days when you don't feel like exercising at all.

Another effective idea is to place your athletic shoes near the door so that you are reminded of the need to walk rather than drive. You might also consider rewarding yourself for keeping with your exercise program. Your reward could be as elaborate as a

cruise or as small as a treat from the dollar store. The idea is to make sure that your accomplishment is celebrated.

While we're on the topic of celebration, seriously consider throwing a party once you've reached an exercise milestone. You can serve nutritious snacks and beverages and even encourage your guests to come in their athletic wear in order to build upon the party's theme. Sharing your joy can help to motivate you to continue your physical activities.

It should be said that there is no right way to exercise. But you do need to make sure that whatever you do is effective and that you're sufficiently motivated to do it. By following just a few simple tips, you can ensure that your exercise routine is not just a fad, that it will continue over the long term. Remember that you may face setbacks from time to time, but that shouldn't stop you from continuing to try to reach your exercise goals.

## **Food Addiction: A Craving You Can't Seem to Control**

You may overdose on potato chips or tortilla chips once in a while, but would you consider yourself to be a food addict? The answer is important, because it could be the key to determining what course of action you need to take in order to lose weight. A number of medical experts say that food addiction is just as serious as nicotine or cocaine addiction—and can potentially be just as deadly.

When you suffer from food addiction, you have an overwhelming desire for a particular food. The desire is so strong, in fact, that if you are unable to consume that food, you suffer from withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, nausea, and depression. Food addicts crave the comfort that a particular food gives them. They also may engage in binge eating. Their cravings for food may be both physical and psychological.

It should be pointed out that there are different varieties of food addiction. For instance, there is compulsive overeating, where an individual goes on eating binges that can last several days. The addict may sometimes lose weight, but tends to gain it back again. Symptoms include eating quickly, compulsively eating alone, and eating when there is no evidence of hunger.

Yet another form of addiction is bulimia, in which an individual overeats, then purges either by vomiting or by taking laxatives. Signs of this condition include isolating oneself when eating, trying to consume huge portions of food rapidly, and being preoccupied with one's weight.

Food addiction can also come in the form of anorexia, where an individual attempts to starve oneself in order to achieve an unrealistic weight. Anorexics tend to be 15 percent below normal body weight and have a phobia about being fat. They have

difficulty eating with other people and appear to be obsessed with weight. They may engage in ritualistic behavior involving food and may suffer from depression.

The good news is that food addiction can be successfully treated. This treatment can come in a variety of forms. A food addict may work with a psychotherapist to develop new ways to deal with food and his or her emotions. The therapist might be able to identify the source of the individual's fear or anger—the reason behind the individual's addiction. In the majority of cases, the psychologist will help the individual to develop a treatment plan which spells out expectations and goals, both for the short-term and the long-term. In the most serious cases, an individual may have to undergo in-patient treatment at a psychological facility. Treatment often involves helping the individual to return to healthy eating methods, dealing with the underlying emotional causes of addiction, and learning effective coping techniques.

Food addicts often follow the tenets of the same kind of 12-step program used by alcoholics. This involves admitting their powerlessness over food, their belief that they could be restored to sanity, and an admission of their faults and failings. In addition, food addicts often draw strength from support groups made up of people who have similar difficulties dealing with food. Just knowing that there are other people who face the same challenges can be incredibly therapeutic.

It is unclear at this point whether food addiction is a genetically-based illness. Certainly, however, there is evidence of eating patterns being passed down from one generation to the next. In fact, many food addicts may only seek help after they have determined that their illness could adversely affect their children.

It is entirely possible that a food addiction can never be cured, that it can only be treated. In other words, the recovery period for the addiction can last a lifetime. However, one should never lose hope of beating a food addiction. With patience and with time, individual addicts can learn the behavioral skills which will enable them to keep their weight under control. Of course, there will be times when individuals will be tempted to indulge in sweets or excessive carbohydrates. However, knowing the pain that they will undergo if they continue their harmful eating habits could be just the incentive they need to stay the course.

### **Dieting: It May be All in the Timing**

You begin your typical day with a croissant and a coffee. By mid-morning, you're a bit overwhelmed with work and so you eat some potato chips. At lunch, you're starving again so you eat a few slices of pizza and more potato chips. By mid-afternoon, you're bored again, so you decide to sneak in a candy bar. Dinner means a multi-course meal of steak, potatoes with sour cream, some pasta, and strawberry ice cream. Right before bed, you decide to sneak in another candy bar.

Of course, there are obvious problems with this kind of diet. But, aside from the questionable nutritional value of the food, there's also the problem of the timing of the meals and snacks. When dieting, it's not only a question of what you eat. When you eat also matters. But, if you've been conditioned to have three square meals a day and as many snacks as you want, how can you go about changing your behavior?

To begin with, you should only eat when you're actually hungry. This means you should not eat out of boredom, sadness, fear, or for any other emotional reasons. Food exists as fuel to help rev up your body for the challenges you face each day. You should not look upon food as a means of comfort or a path to love.

At times, you may notice that you reach for a snack because you just want a break from your routine. Maybe your work is getting to you, or your children are trying your patience. You have to recognize the fact that eating for emotional reasons is a learned behavior; so, in order to reverse course, you simply have to unlearn the behavior. It may take some time, but eventually you'll find that you are able to limit your eating to those times when your hunger pains start.

But you should also know that just because a person eats often, that does not necessarily mean that he or she is overeating. A number of reputable diet plans recommend eating five or six small meals a day in order to keep your metabolism humming and to ward off hunger. However, these meals should be carefully planned in advance. Otherwise, you could find yourself packing on the pounds because of your frequent snacks. For instance, you might plan to eat bran cereal for your first meal of the day, a bowl of strawberries for your second, some light turkey on whole wheat bread and some apricots for your third, a cup of yogurt for your fourth, some low-fat cheese and crackers for your fifth, and lean roast beef, green beans, and jello for your sixth meal of the day.

When should you eat your small meals? They should be scattered throughout the day—no more than four hours apart. In this way, you can keep your metabolism up, enabling you to burn calories consistently throughout the morning and afternoon. Generally speaking, however, you should only eat when you're actually experiencing hunger.

A survey conducted in 1999 found that 60 percent of Americans skip breakfast. However, you should be aware of the fact that eating breakfast can be a key to losing weight. If you don't skip breakfast, you'll find that you'll burn calories faster, leading to weight loss.

Try to avoid eating late-night snacks. This is because your body will probably store the calories rather than burn them off. Again, your snacking may not be the result of actual hunger but simply because you have nothing better to do at that time of the night. Simply changing your nightly routine may help you to keep away from food at the midnight hour.

No doubt, it can be quite difficult to change your eating routine. You may have eaten three large meals all your life, and you find it difficult to stop. However, just a few subtle changes will help to transform both your day—and your appetite. If you find yourself reverting to your old routine, forgive yourself, and start again. If you are kind to yourself, it's more likely that you will eventually be able to find a diet plan you can live with—one that will not only help you lose weight, but keep you satisfied as well.

## **A Lesson in Eating—the Right Way**

It probably comes to you as naturally as breathing—the art of eating. However, you might never have been taught to eat well. This is critically important because, unless you learn to eat well, you may never master the art of dieting. In our society, certain inappropriate eating habits have become routinely. By attacking these habits, you can increase the likelihood that you will actually lose weight.

To begin with, it is important that you learn to eat slowly. At first, this might be quite a challenge. We have been conditioned to live in a fast food world. We rush meals in order to have time to run to soccer practice, to a piano recital, or to school and work. We think that rushing saves us time—but such a routine can easily backfire, leaving us with unwanted pounds. Studies have shown that at least 10 minutes is required before the brain receives the message that the stomach is full. This means that you could be eating long after you are actually satiated. Your meal—whether it's in the morning, afternoon, or evening—should last at least ten minutes. Train yourself to lengthen your meal by engaging in conversation, resting your fork between courses, chewing slowly, and drinking plenty of water between courses. You should also wait at least ten minutes after your main meal before deciding if you need dessert. Within that period of time, you may discover that you weren't really hungry after all.

Another trick is to place serving dishes on the counter and leave them there. As a result, you'll actually have to get up out of your seat in order to get more food. You may decide that it's not worth the bother. Or you may find that you discover that you need no more food between courses. Also, do not eat directly from an ice cream carton, tortilla chip bag, or cracker box. Otherwise, you could find yourself easily overeating.

You should always eat at the table. This prevents you from trying to engage in multi-tasking, such as surfing the 'Net, watching television, or flipping through magazines while you eat. At the table, you'll be forced to concentrate on how much food you are putting into your mouth. If you eat anywhere else, you may lose track of how much food you're consuming.

Abandon the idea that you must clean your plate. It is simply not true. Research has shown that more than half of adults insist on cleaning their plates, even when they are already full. This means that you are overeating simply out of politeness. Such a habit only serves to add unwanted pounds. Instead of cleaning your plate, try eating only that portion of food that makes you feel full. You'll be healthier and happier that way.

Do not keep food in plain view during the day. If the cookie jar is open or the pretzel bag is out on the table, you'll have a tremendous urge to eat, even if you are not hungry. After a meal, put your food away in the refrigerator, inside your cupboard, or in the Lazy Susan. This way, you'll actually have to do some work to get at food before you consume it.

If you happen to overeat, don't spend a great deal of time sulking. Accept your mistake and move on. If you've veered off course, take corrective action and forget about it. Otherwise, you could find yourself eating out of frustration, or going off your diet entirely. It's better to sabotage a single meal than a lifetime's worth of meals.

You may be self-conscious at first as you attempt to change your eating habits. Realize that your bad habits did not start overnight, so it will take some time to correct them. While it may seem an arduous task initially, it is well worth the effort. You'll quickly find that your new eating habits have helped you to lose unwanted weight. Granted, such techniques as hiding your food and eating more slowly will not in themselves cause you to lose weight, but they will help you to curb your overeating over the long run. And you'll be a better person for it.

## **Exploring the World of Diets**

Diets are now as common as a hot dog on a Fourth of July afternoon. However, it can be confusing for consumers to identify different types of diets. The National Institutes of Health have identified a variety of diet plans in existence in the market today. Understanding these various diet programs can be the first step to losing significant weight.

The fixed menu diet tells you exactly what you will consume over a period of time. This makes it easy on the dieter, because he or she does not have to shop for their own food. The disadvantage to this type of diet is that the dieter fails to learn how to choose food for himself or herself. Also, the diet food you are provided with can be quite bland and boring. Also, you may find it difficult to follow the diet plan when you are traveling. A number of medical experts recommend ultimately replacing the fixed menu diet with another plan in order to keep yourself healthy.

In an exchange diet, you get to choose your food from a number of different groups. In other words, from the starch group you could select pasta, rice, or potatoes. As a result, the diet offers a good deal of variety and you shouldn't have any difficulty following it while you are on vacation. Such a diet also enables you to learn how to make healthy choices for yourself.

With pre-packaged meal diets, you have to buy food in pre-set portions. As a result, you are able to determine how much of a given food item you are allowed to have on a given day. Still, such a program tends to be expensive and makes food choices for you, so you don't get the experience of selecting your own meals.

If you go on a formula diet, you will be drinking your breakfast, lunch, or dinner, or a combination of the meals. These liquid formulas are often filled with proteins and carbohydrates and have little in the way of fat. The formula diet is convenient and can be economical. However, while individuals tend to lose weight over the short term, they may not be able to sustain the weight loss over the long run.

According to federal health officials, questionable diets are those that promote eating a certain combination of foods in order to lose pounds. While such diets are low-cal, they often lack valuable nutrients. In addition, they may be unworkable for long-term weight loss.

In flexible diets, the dieter must decide what type of food he or she will eat and the size of portions. Such diets can be low-fat, low-cal, or both. However, one disadvantage of such a diet program is that an individual might manage to cut out fat, but might also end up loading up on sugars.

A study conducted last year showed that individuals could lose weight through a low-fat, high-carbohydrate approach. The research indicated that the pounds could melt away, even if you didn't exercise or reduce calories. However, the study was refuted by Gary Foster of the University of Pennsylvania's Weight and Eating Disorders Program, who claimed that consuming large quantities of carbs without cutting calories could lead to a "public health disaster." But the author of the study maintained that, since fats and carbs might be metabolized differently, reducing calories does not allow one to reduce weight. The American Dietetic Association maintains that it is possible to lose weight using a number of different approaches.

Because of the variety of diets available—and the confusion over which ones are truly effective—some physicians recommend consulting with a dietician in order to obtain a personalized weight loss plan. In this way, you can rely on expert advice for your meal planning. The plan can also be individualized to meet your unique nutritional needs.

Generally speaking, health experts say the best weight loss programs combine diet with exercise. In this way, you can ensure that your body is using food efficiently. You can build up your strength and muscle tone, becoming more fit in the process. If you have serious questions about the best way to go about weight loss, it's best if you talk to your family doctor.

## **Don't Skip Breakfast If You Want to Lose Weight**

In the morning, you may find that you are playing a continual game of "catch up." You're rushing to the shower, rushing through traffic, rushing to work. You may feel as if you don't have time for breakfast, let alone a nutritious breakfast. You may find that you're just not hungry at that time of day, or you believe that you need to lose weight, so you skip breakfast altogether. What you may not realize is that, by eliminating breakfast from your morning routine, you're jeopardizing your health—and your waistline.

There are a number of good reasons to eat breakfast, particularly if you are a dieter. To begin with, the very act of eating breakfast can speed up your metabolism, which is critical to weight loss. Think about it. You may eat dinner around 6 p.m. If you wait until lunch to eat again, as many as 18 hours might have passed. Breakfast is therefore critical to your overall health and well-being.

Another problem with skipping breakfast is that it tends to make you overeat at lunch. Studies have shown that the vast majority of successful dieters do eat breakfast. This may seem counter-intuitive, the idea that you must eat food in order to lose weight. But the research shows clearly that that in fact is the case. Breakfast can also aid your concentration. A number of studies demonstrate that breakfast improves one's focus, helping him or her at work or at school.

The type of breakfast you eat depends upon the diet you are pursuing. You might choose a high fiber meal, such as cereal, or a high protein meal, such as scrambled eggs and ham. Your breakfast should contain plenty of vitamins and minerals to help your body remain healthy throughout the day.

Another interesting aspect about breakfast is that it is a proven mood elevator. This is quite important, since it is critical to remain positive when trying to lose weight. Anything that you can do to lift your spirits—provided that it does not cause you to pack on the pounds—should be considered beneficial. Also, breakfast sets the pattern for the day. If you make healthy decisions at breakfast, you're more likely to make the right decisions regarding the other meals of the day.

One thing you should avoid at breakfast is eating something high in sugar, such as a sugary breakfast cereal. While such a meal can lift your energy level temporarily, after a few hours, your energy level will drop again. While it is always better to eat something than nothing, you should be careful in the food choices you make at breakfast.

Breakfast can enhance the efficiency of the body, making it easier for you to burn fat. This is true for both young and old, so make sure your children eat breakfast as well. A smoothly-running body is a healthy body and one that is more likely to become lean over time.

At first glance, there appears to be no downside to eating breakfast. However, it is important to issue a cautionary note. Some people use breakfast as an opportunity to binge. They figure that they can eat breakfast and then skip the rest of their meals. However, this is not a healthy approach. In order to work effectively, your body needs to eat regular meals. Some diets call for three meals a day; others rely on five or six smaller meals eaten more frequently. In any event, while breakfast may be your most important meal of the day it should not be your only meal of the day.

Eating breakfast is a habit. However, if you haven't eaten breakfast in a while, it may be a difficult habit to get into. The key to starting a healthy habit is persistence. Try to eat something every morning, even if it's only a little something. Make sure that you

have time to actually sit at the table and eat, rather than trying to eat breakfast on the run. Scheduling time for breakfast means that you have made it a priority in your life. If you follow this formula, you should be in a better position to lose weight over the long term.

## **The Raw Food Diet: Will It Work for You?**

A relatively new food trend has appeared on the diet landscape. It's known as the raw food approach, and from California to Connecticut, the trend appears to be gaining strength. The centerpiece of the diet is uncooked, highly nutritious foods. The idea behind the diet is that a number of foods lose nutritional value when they are cooked.

For the most part, those who subscribe to the raw food diet eat fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and legumes. Beverages consist of unpasteurized milk, water, juice, and tea, but the diet excludes beer and liquor. It is a revolutionary way to eat, and many of those who use it say it keeps them thin and healthy.

However, while the raw diet is rich in some nutrients, it lacks others. For instance, it tends to exclude such vitally important nutrients as protein, iron, and calcium. Therefore, it may not be an appropriate diet over the long term. Also, one disadvantage to the raw food diet is that the food tends to be loaded with pesticides. Therefore, it might be best to consume only organic raw food.

For health reasons, the diet is not recommended for children, women who are pregnant, people suffering from osteoporosis, and those who are anemic. Critics of the diet also note that it can be extremely time consuming trying to prepare food with all the chopping and blending that's involved. As a result, a raw food diet isn't for everyone.

If you decide to turn to a raw food diet, you may have to have supplements to make up for the nutrients you are not getting. These supplements include vitamin B12, zinc, copper, and chromium. Also, since proteins from plants do not have as many amino acids as animal protein, you'll have to consume a number of different raw foods in order to remain healthy.

Some medical experts have suggested that a raw food diet is a good antidote to eating disorders. This is because such food provides nutrition without creating fat. Eating raw foods can give you a positive outlook on food in general, enabling you to combat psychological addictions to fatty and high sugar foods.

Some supporters of the raw food diet believe that some raw foods are superior to others. These experts recommend focusing on fruits and vegetables and eating only minimal amounts of nuts and seeds. They also say that the fresher the food, the better. In other words, the best raw foods come from your own garden rather than from a supermarket.

At this point, it might be helpful to say some additional words about proteins. According to the World Health Organization, people need to consume five percent of

their calories from protein. Interestingly enough, five percent of the calories in fruit are derived from protein, while as much as half of the calories from vegetables are protein-based. Beans and grains derive about a quarter of their calories from protein. Backers of the raw food diet insist that raw foods provide a better source of protein than cooked foods, since the cooking process itself may make as much as half of all protein unusable.

Some medical experts see great benefits in the raw food diet. In addition to enabling weight loss, the diet can ostensibly increase one's metabolism, making calorie burning easier. One's immune system can become stronger, and the body may rid itself of harmful toxins while following the raw foods program. The raw foods diet is also advertised as a stress-reliever and a method for enhancing digestion. The diet may enable you to balance your PH level and lessen your risk of heart disease. Some dieters even claim that the raw food regimen improves the look of their skin. Finally, the diet is seen as a healthy way of responding to hunger.

If you decide to try the raw food diet, you should attempt to plan your meals in advance. That way, you can assure yourself that you are receiving the maximum amount of nutrients. Also, those who follow the diet recommend eating fruit early in the day in order to boost your energy level and improve your digestion.

## **The Vegetarian Diet: A Weight Loss Solution?**

If you've been to any large banquets recently, you may have noticed people passing up the prime rib and baked chicken in order to feast on a vegetarian meal. Vegetarianism seems to be gaining in popularity each year, spurred on by health concerns, weight difficulties, and celebrity endorsements. You may find that a vegetarian diet is the key to weight loss in your particular case.

First of all, it is important to define the vegetarian diet. You may be surprised to learn that there are actually a variety of vegetarian diets in use today. In some cases, vegetarians eat only fruits, vegetables, beans, and nuts. In other cases, they may also eat cheese and drink milk, while in still other cases, they may eat eggs.

One of the advantages to the vegetarian diet is that it tends to be low in fat and cholesterol. As a result, a vegetarian diet can help you avoid heart problems and even cancer. However, you may also find that you are missing some important vitamins and minerals on a strictly vegetarian diet.

It has been said that the key to a successful vegetarian diet is planning. You must decide what you will be eating for every meal in order to ensure that you receive the proper nutrients. Otherwise, you may end up starving your body of the nutrients you need in order to be healthy.

A major benefit of the vegetarian diet is that it tends to involve a healthy serving of fruits and vegetables, along with whole grains. However, getting enough protein can be a

challenge. Therefore, you might consider adding soy to your diet, which is high in protein content. Another important consideration is iron. You'll need to make sure that you eat spinach and beans in order to guarantee that you receive enough iron, since you will not be consuming customary sources of iron such as liver and roast beef.

You may need to supplement your diet with vitamins in order to ensure that you receive the appropriate amount of B-12, Vitamin D, calcium, and zinc. Otherwise, you'll have to load up on cereals, soy milk, spinach, and broccoli. Also, eating a vegetarian diet does not mean you have a license to eat as many sugary foods as you want. You'll still have to restrict high-calorie foods.

Variety has been called the spice of life and it is also the key to an effective vegetarian diet. You'll need to eat an array of fruits and vegetables. Also, if you do use dairy, be sure that you choose non-fat or low-fat milk and cheese. Since eggs are rich in cholesterol, you should eat them only in moderation.

Studies have shown that vegetarians tend to consume fewer calories each day than meat-eaters. Also, the body mass index—a tool used to measure obesity—is generally lower for vegetarians than for the population at large. However, as a vegetarian, you will still need to pay attention to portion control and calorie counts. Therefore, while vegetarianism may not be a panacea for weight loss, it can certainly help in the battle against the bulge.

However, it should be noted here that some people mistakenly look upon vegetarianism as a quick fix. They figure that if they give up meat for a couple of weeks, they'll lose weight. Then, after their trial period is over, they go back to their old eating habits. This is a bad pattern because it encourages yo-yo dieting. If you decide to go on a vegetarian diet, it is very important that you stick with it. Otherwise, you may be greatly disappointed in your weight loss progress.

Vegetarianism is not for everyone. However, if you enjoy fruits and vegetables, are non-committal about meat, and are good at planning meals, you may want to go vegan. But if you do not fall into that category, another diet plan may be preferable. Which diet program you ultimately choose may depend greatly upon your personal preferences and what kind of diet regimen you are prepared to follow over the long run. The key to any successful diet is commitment; you must be determined to succeed.

### Misconceptions About Weight Loss

A number of misconceptions persist about weight loss. These are quite serious, because they could affect not only an individual's weight, but also his or her general health as well. The more you know about the misconceptions about weight loss, the more likely it is that you will end up following a suitable weight reduction plan.

One popular misconception is that any product that has been labeled “natural” is safe. In fact, you should be aware of the fact that these products often do not undergo vigorous scientific tests. For instance, ephedra, which has been included in some weight loss products has been banned by federal authorities because it has been determined to be unhealthy. Even those products that do not contain ephedra can be dangerous because they have components that are like ephedra. As a result, you should consult your doctor before using herbal weight loss products. Your physician is in the best position to know whether a weight loss pill or other product is appropriate in your case.

Another misconception is that you can still lose weight, even if you eat whatever you choose. Actually, you need to be careful about how many calories you consume and increase your exercise in order to ensure that you burn more fat than you take in. Also, it is important that you limit portions in order to ensure that you do not add extra weight. If you select low-calorie foods and you eat smaller portions, while enhancing your physical activity, you should be able to lose weight. However, you may still be able to eat some of the food you like best—provided you eat it in moderation or, if high in calories, only sparingly.

Yet another misconception is that, because a food item is labeled low-fat, it has no calories to speak of. While low-fat foods may indeed be low-cal, some processed low-fat food products have just as many calories as the high-fat types. In fact, they may be loaded in sugar or flour, increasing the total calorie count. As a result, it is important for you to check the nutrition labels on food packages in order to determine the exact amount of calories per serving. It is also imperative that you find out what constitutes a serving size so that you will not be tempted to overeat.

Some individuals believe that fast food is inherently bad and cannot be eaten while following a diet program. However, if you are knowledgeable, you can actually eat at fast food restaurants and still lose weight. It’s best, for instance, if you do not indulge in supersize combo meals. You might, however, consider splitting a combo with your spouse or friend. Avoid soft drinks and drink water instead. Consider eating a salad or a grilled chicken breast sandwich. Keep the condiments—such as mayonnaise and salad dressings—to a minimum. Ask the restaurant not to put bacon or cheese on your sandwich, and avoid eating French fries or fried chicken. If you go to a Mexican restaurant, try a taco that is made with salsa rather than cheese or sauce. Following these simple recommendations can make your visit to a fast food outlet worthwhile—and non-fattening.

Some people operate under the misconception that dining after 8 p.m. always leads to weight gain. No doubt it is possible, but what matters most is how many calories you consume and how much fat you burn off. While it is a good idea to avoid snacking in front of the television, you might be able to have a nightly snack, if you haven’t consumed that much high-calorie food during the course of the day.

Other individuals believe that lifting weights is harmful because it will cause you to add weight to your frame. In actuality, weightlifting can enable you to lose weight. This

is because lifting weights assists you in building muscle, which burns more calories than fat. Engaging in strength training twice or three times a week can be an effective part of your overall weight loss program.

Obviously, misconceptions about dieting are plentiful. That is why it is so critically important that you consult a registered dietician or other health professional before beginning any major weight loss program.

## **Shopping Your Way to Weight Loss**

While shopping may not qualify as an aerobic activity, it can certainly help you to shed the pounds, if you follow the right formula. What you buy largely determines what you will eat. Therefore, if you want to maintain a healthy diet at home, you'll need to do some advanced planning before heading out to the supermarket.

The secret to weight loss may begin with your shopping list. You need to take some time before going to the store to assess what your nutritional needs are. For instance, a healthy diet might very well include breads and cereals, dairy products, vegetables and fruits, along with meat, fish and poultry. However, you'll need to decide on exactly which products to buy within each food category.

For instance, rather than purchasing white bread or cereals with little fiber, consider whole wheat bread and whole wheat cereals. Pass up the whole milk and whole milk yogurt and buy non-fat milk and yogurt instead. You should avoid iceberg lettuce and opt for Romaine; select fresh fruit rather than fruit in heavy syrup. You may be tempted to buy fried chicken, bacon or spareribs, but choose low-fat options such as baked chicken, lean hamburger, and grilled fish.

It's a good idea to go grocery shopping after you have eaten a full meal. Otherwise, your hunger could drive you to buy junk food and other unhealthy snacks. If you are operating on a full stomach, you'll think more clearly and you will be less likely to buy food impulsively. Also, it is critically important that you do not buy more food than you need. Otherwise, you will have a powerful incentive to overeat.

Before you go shopping, you might want to check out the layout of the supermarket. Find out where you can find those items that are likely to appear on your list. Otherwise, you could find yourself browsing the shelves, looking for food that appears interesting—but could also be quite fattening. Certainly, it may take some extra time to “scope out” the supermarket, but it will be well worth the effort, if it results in weight loss.

Whenever possible, you should buy individually packaged food. These single servings allow you to maintain proper portion control. For instance, if you feel you must indulge in potato chips, you will be far better off if you buy a single-serving bag rather than the family pack. Remember, large portions equal weight gain.

You might actually want to avoid shopping with coupons. Coupons can tempt you to buy high-calorie items that you might otherwise pass up. While everyone wants a good bargain, you don't want to end up paying for that deal by gaining additional pounds. It's a sad fact that you will rarely find a coupon for fresh fruit and vegetables. But you might think of the situation this way: You will end up saving money if you eat "fresh" because you will not have to invest in additional clothes.

Also, when you're considering which foods to buy, concentrate on the product labels. There, you'll find a great deal of nutritional information, indicating fat content, calorie content, portion size, and vitamin and mineral content. If you end up bringing the product home, you should serve the item according to the suggested portion size. In other words, if a portion equals one-half cup, don't opt for two cups. In essence, you should be treating food as if it's a medication that must be used as directed. In this way, you should avoid the weight loss that comes with overeating.

It is interesting to note that the American Institute for Cancer Research determined that only 12 percent of shoppers determined portion size by using the label. As a result, paying attention to nutrition labels is a counter-cultural thing to do. But it is certainly a good habit to get into. Otherwise, at the end of the day, you could end up with far more fat than you bargained for.

You may be amazed at the amount of weight you can lose just by diligent shopping. A little advanced planning can go a long way to ensuring weight loss. And you might actually save yourself some money, since you will no longer be buying expensive snacks.

## **Carbs: The Good, the Bad, and the Healthy**

Carbs are a part of nearly every dieter's vocabulary. A number of diets are famous for fighting carb consumption. But you should know that not every carbohydrate is created alike. While it is true that you can lose weight by cutting carbs, carbs are also necessary for a good diet.

To begin with, we should define our terms. Carbs are derived from a number of different sources. They are present in bread, pasta, fruits, and vegetables. There are also a number of different types of carbs. For instance, carbs come in the form of sugars, starches, and fiber.

For the most part, the digestive system divides carbs into sugar molecules which can be taken into the bloodstream. The majority of carbs are transformed into glucose or blood sugar. In this way, carbs provide energy for our bodies. Those who lack sufficient carbs in their diet may suffer from fatigue.

Carbs can be filled with nutrients. For instance, fruit contains vitamins A and C, fiber, and folate. Vegetables are also a good vitamin and fiber source; in fact, they usually contain a greater variety of minerals than other foods do. Whole grains can

provide you with fiber, protein, and B vitamins. Legumes can provide you with protein, iron, and potassium.

But carbs can also be potentially bad for your health. For instance, cookies, potato chips, and soft drinks also contain carbs in the form of sugar and flour. You should know that refined carbohydrates have been linked with diabetes and heart diseases, making these carbs a dangerous choice. There are a number of good reasons to ban these carbs from your diet. For instance, they are extremely high in calories and offer little in the way of nutrients. Because they contain no fiber, they will not keep you satiated. In fact, such carbs offer you zero nutrients, but plenty of fat.

Therefore, you should avoid processed grains and sugars. Instead, eat whole grains, fruits, and vegetables to maximize your nutritional intake. Instead of eliminating carbs completely from your diet, simply ban those that increase the size of your waistline.

There is another way to think about carbs. You can generally divide them into two categories: simple and complex. A simple carb, such as sugar, promotes weight gain. As a result, you should select low-sugar foods, especially low-sugar beverages. In contrast, complex carbohydrates promote weight loss. Health experts recommend that dieters consume between 55 and 65 percent of their calories from these types of carbs. Such carbs include fruits and vegetables and a number of other natural foods.

But it isn't enough to simply eat fruits and vegetables. You also need to avoid fattening sauces and condiments such as mayonnaise and butter. By adding butter to your broccoli or mayonnaise to your potatoes, you can raise the calorie amount exponentially, sabotaging your diet.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture promotes a food pyramid that recommends as many as eleven servings of bread, pasta, and cereal. However, a number of dieticians are suggesting that Americans should cut the carbs—period. In one poll, 81 percent of the respondents said they were abiding by a low-carb diet.

It is interesting to point out that neither the American Heart Association nor the American Diabetes Association believes that the glycemic index should be considered when following a weight loss plan. While the Diabetes Association concedes that various foods offer different glycemic responses, the Association's leaders believe the most critical factor is the number of carbs rather than the form of the carbs consumed.

Granted, dietary information about carbs can be confusing. However, a number of dieticians say that, while you might not want to cut carbs out of your diet entirely, you should eat carbs only in moderation. Health experts also say that you should limit your carb intake to good carbs and pass up the bad ones. By following such a plan, you should have energy—but you shouldn't pack on the weight. It may be difficult at first to follow such a diet plan, since many of us are conditioned to eat bad carbs in order to elevate our moods. In time, however, you may find that you enjoy the fruits and vegetables you're eating, and you may not even miss those tortilla chips.

## **The Atkins Method: Is it Right for You?**

Over the years, the Atkins plan has become synonymous with weight loss. Fans of the program say that it has proven to be instrumental in helping them to shed unwanted pounds. They talk of improved overall health and greater energy as a result of the Atkins program. However, critics maintain that Atkins could lead to heart damage, making it an unhealthy diet.

Supporters of Atkins say just about anyone can slim down using their program. However, there are certain people that are most likely to benefit from the Atkins plan. These include yo-yo dieters, who find themselves losing weight, only to gain it back again; dieters who feel constantly hungry; and those who eat for emotional reasons. Binge eaters and constant snackers can also benefit from the Atkins program. In addition, those who suffer from a food addiction are prime candidates for Atkins.

Atkins relies heavily on proteins and fats, along with carbohydrates that are rich in nutrients. The idea is to strictly reduce the amount of non-nutritious carbohydrates you consume. The theory behind this is that, when carbs are restricted, you end up burning fat rather than glucose. In addition, it has been shown that, all things being equal, you will lose more fat with Atkins than with other types of weight loss plans.

The Atkins plan is divided into four stages. During the initial stage, your body moves from burning carbohydrates to burning fats. You should also be able to kick the sugar habit during this stage. During the second stage, your weight loss will accelerate, but you will also be able to eat larger portions of vegetables. In the third stage, known as pre-maintenance, you will continue to add more foods to the mix. The final stage involves lifetime maintenance. During this phase, you can continue to fight food addictions, maintain your goal weight, and decrease the chance that you will suffer from diabetes.

However, it can be difficult to stick with the Atkins plan. This is because the temptation to eat carbohydrates and sweets is so great. Friends and relatives can become diet saboteurs, preventing you from achieving the results you're looking for. In this case, the best defense is a good offense. This means telling your significant others in advance that you're determined to complete the Atkins program. Inform them that you don't want to even be offered French fries and potato chips.

The Journal of the American Medical Association has suggested that the Atkins plan can be dangerous for children. This is not surprising, considering that young people are still growing and need all the nutrients they can get, whether the vitamins and minerals are from carbohydrates or other sources. Supporters of Atkins say that, while children may not benefit from a restriction of vegetables and fruits, they could consume fewer potatoes and breads and still remain healthy.

Some medical experts say that the Atkins approach is not appropriate for people who already suffer from kidney or liver trouble. Also, because Atkins reduces the amount of fruits and vegetables an individual consumes, the diet can leave people at greater risk for such problems as cancer and heart disease. As a result, you should probably check with

your family physician before resorting to the Atkins plan, or any other low-carb, high-protein diet.

It is likely that the Atkins plan will remain controversial for the foreseeable future. While it has been proven effective in helping people lose weight, it may also place individuals at a higher risk for serious diseases. A great deal of additional research needs to be conducted in order to determine if Atkins is a miracle cure or a medical nightmare. Once more studies are conducted, the long-term effects of Atkins on the human body may be easier to determine. If you are generally in good health and have a normal energy level, you might give Atkins a try. If, however, you suffer from any serious diseases, or are experiencing symptoms such as high blood pressure, you might consider an alternative diet plan. In the end, you, in consultation with your doctor, will have to determine the diet program that's appropriate in your particular case.

### **The Detox Diet: Losing Weight the Natural Way**

If you prefer the natural way of life—organic foods, home-grown vegetables, and fishing for yourself—the detox diet may be just what you're looking for. This diet plan is designed to rid the body of any toxic materials. Because of the numerous chemicals that exist in our world, a number of individuals say a detox diet is necessary for good health in the long-term. With the detox diet, the body rids itself of toxins through the skin and lungs. The diet may be accompanied by other holistic health techniques, such as the administration of nutritional supplements, hydrotherapy, and physical activity.

How, exactly, does the body become contaminated by toxins? The contamination can occur as a result of food additives, mercury, drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. Through the process of digestion, the body takes in the toxins. In addition to promoting weight loss, a detox diet can help heal migraines, stomach trouble, colds, and joint pain. It may also be effective against heart disease and arthritis.

You should not start a detox diet without talking to your health care provider. It may be that you are suffering from symptoms such as pain or fatigue because you have a serious illness that must be treated. In such a case, the detox diet alone may not be enough to cure what is ailing you.

A detox diet may not always be appropriate. But if you believe you have ingested a great deal of chemicals and you find yourself fatigued, the detox diet may be beneficial for your overall health and well-being. Detox diet enthusiasts say it should be followed at least twice a year in order to improve one's health. If you suffer from a specific disease, however, you may need to maintain the program for a protracted period of time.

You may notice immediate results from your detox diet. These results can include enhanced energy, better skin, easier digestion, and clearer thinking. Once your detox diet is complete, you should attempt to replenish your body with nutrients in order to, in effect, "build your body" back up.

However, there are certain individuals who do not make good candidates for a detox diet. These include heart disease patients, cancer patients, and kidney disease patients. And, while a detox diet can cleanse your body, it should not be considered a substitute for your ordinary medication. In fact, you should never stop taking medication without talking to your physician first.

It should be noted that there are side-effects that have been associated with the detox diet. These include migraines, skin problems, or fatigue. Usually, however, these side-effects disappear in time. As a result, a number of people actually use their vacation time in order to engage in detox so that their work will not be compromised.

You'll be happy to know that there are a number of foods you can indulge in while on a detox diet. These include fruits, vegetables, rice, chickpeas, fish, oil, and herbal tea. While following the diet, you'll also need to drink eight glasses of water in order to eliminate waste from the blood. However, you should not drink immediately before or after your meals. You should also make sure that you chew your food thoroughly in order to promote proper digestion.

However, there are also a number of foods that you will have to give up. These include sugar, milk, eggs, wheat products, gluten, and caffeine-filled beverages. You must also avoid foods with preservatives, yeast, chocolate, and anything that is high in fat.

Is it possible to lose weight with the detox diet? Most definitely. But you could have a difficult time keeping the weight off since you will eventually have to go off of the diet. However, it is possible that some of the dietary guidelines that you observe while detoxing will continue long after the diet is over. Also, just giving up alcohol will ensure that you will lose weight. For instance, you may find that you simply lose your taste for food high in fat content. Nevertheless, the detox diet can be quite challenging—especially if you are emotionally attached to the foods that are banned. Yet, in time, you may decide that going on the detox diet was the best move you ever made.

## **The GI Diet: Part of the War on Fat**

You might have heard of the GI diet and wondered if it had anything to do with the nation's military forces. Actually, this meal plan is not connected with any branch of the armed services. But it is definitely an important part of the war on fat. By following the GI diet, you might be able to successfully fight the battle of the bulge.

To begin with, it is important to define our terms. GI refers to glycemic index. The GI measures just how quickly the body breaks apart food in order to develop glucose, which has been referred to as a major energy source for the body. The GI was the brainchild of Dr. David Jenkins, a nutritional expert at the University of Toronto.

If food ranks high on the GI scale, it means that the food breaks down quickly. As a result, the body is not satiated and goes looking elsewhere for food. However, food that

is low-glucose breaks down less quickly, which means that it makes you feel satiated. The GI diet, therefore, is made up of food that is low on the GI barometer. If you follow this food plan, you will be eating lean meat and fish, whole grains, nuts, legumes, and fruits and vegetables. In addition, you can partake of dairy, as long as it is low-fat. However, you'll be passing up cake, cookies, bread, and other foods that are comprised of white flour and therefore high on the GI.

Those who support the GI diet maintain that the vast majority of diets are unsuccessful because dieters do not feel satiated. Dieters may also feel fatigued, causing them to binge. In addition, many diets are complex, requiring individuals to do complicated calculations in order to determine how much they should eat.

Following the GI diet is as easy as following a traffic light. Red means stop—in other words, don't eat that particular item. Yellow means proceed to eat with caution—and moderation. Green means go ahead and eat the item—it's good for you. There are numerous advantages to the GI diet. To begin with, it provides proper nutrition, which means that it is heart-healthy. Also, you can eat as much as you want—if the foods have been given the green light. Chances are you won't feel as if you're running on empty with this diet, since it's designed to keep you feeling satiated. It is believed that the diet can reduce the likelihood that you will be afflicted with heart disease, diabetes, stroke, colon cancer and prostate cancer. The GI diet is easy to maintain and equally easy to follow.

You might believe that the GI diet is like Atkins; however, there are notable differences. For example, the Atkins approach stresses high protein and animal fat while curbing carbohydrates. Atkins is based on the philosophy that, if the body does not receive carbs, it will end up breaking down fat instead. Over the long term, Atkins has been linked to kidney damage, heart disease, and Alzheimer's.

But the GI diet is based on carbs such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and encourages dieters to eliminate saturated fat, winning it the endorsement of a number of nutritionists. Still, it should be noted that the GI diet is not perfect. If you have spent a lifetime eating foods in the red category, you might find the diet quite challenging. Also, during the initial stage of the diet, the dieter's weight may rise until the body makes an adjustment.

The GI diet may not be as popular as other diet programs, but it has a number of qualities to recommend it. It is not complicated, so it may not lead to as much frustration as other diets. The traffic light system might appeal to even the most unsophisticated of dieters. It encourages the consumption of good carbohydrates which are nutrient-rich. It is also sure to eliminate an individual's reliance on junk food. While the adjustment to the diet may be difficult at first, a number of dieters maintain that it is well worth the effort. You may actually be surprised to learn exactly how much weight you can lose following the GI system.

## Are You a Carb Addict?

It has been estimated that three out of every four overweight people are addicted to carbohydrates. But what does this mean? In essence, it means that you have too much of the hormone insulin in your system. This insulin prompts you to eat often and to consume the wrong types of foods. Some of the tell-tale signs of carbohydrate addiction include fatigue, mood swings, and migraines which can be caused by low blood sugar.

A carb addiction can lead you to consume a whole bag of pretzels at one sitting, or to indulge in half a cake at dinner time. Your body is conditioned to eat as many carbs as possible. Thus, it may seem that at times you're never really satisfied—no matter how much or how often you eat.

On the official Carb Addicts plan, you eat two meals composed of vegetables and protein; the other meal consists of protein, vegetables that are not filled with starch, and carbohydrates. During this last meal, known as the reward meal, you can even eat dessert. The trick is to skip the carbs for two meals each day.

The authors of the program believe that, if you follow this regimen, you will lose your cravings for carbohydrates in time. If your urge to consume carbs does not disappear by the second week of the program, they recommend checking your diet to see whether you are following the program closely.

With the Carb Addicts plan, like other diet plans, you need to closely monitor your portion sizes. All of your hard work will be in vain if you allow yourself to overindulge in sweets—even if it is for only one meal a day. Also, you need to make sure that the protein you consume is not high in fat. You may want to eat fish, chicken with the skin removed, or lean meats when trying to obtain a protein source.

Another important aspect of the Carb Addicts plan is that you are not permitted artificial sweetener except during your reward meal. This can be quite a challenge, especially if you're accustomed to sweetened coffee in the morning. However, it can be well worth the deprivation in the long run as you see those pounds melt away.

There is no set time for the reward meal; however the authors of the plan recommend that the meal take place in the evening. This is because it can take 12 to 24 hours for the body to overcome carbohydrate overload. There is also a psychological advantage to having the meal at night. It gives you something to look forward to all day long.

You should begin your reward meal with a salad, such as a Caesar salad or an Oriental salad, then divide the rest of the meal into thirds: One third should consist of low-carb vegetables, one-third protein, and one-third carbs. This formula has proven successful in enabling individuals to achieve long-term weight loss.

As with many other meal plans, the biggest challenge for those who are on the Carb Addicts Diet is the ability to stick with it. Dieting can be hard work, no matter what kind of rewards await an individual at the end of the day. Your commitment will enable you to stay with the program, even when it becomes particularly challenging.

Surf the World Wide Web, and you'll find a number of testimonials offering glowing reviews of the Carb Addicts Diet. But you should keep in mind that results can differ from individual to individual. While some people might see rapid weight loss with the Carb Addicts plan, others may see only moderate weight loss. The success of the program may depend on your own individual physiology.

Is the Carb Addicts Diet a fad? It all depends on who you talk to. While some people see it as a significant dietary breakthrough, others view it as just a passing fancy. Medical experts disagree as to whether the Carb Addicts Diet represents sound nutrition. In the end, you, in consultation with your personal physician, will have to decide whether the Carb Addicts Diet will work for you.

## **Losing Weight by Thinking Green**

Now more than ever, people are trying to lose weight by thinking green. Green tea is one of the hottest products on the market today. Its medicinal qualities have been known for years. But can green tea actually enable you to shed those unwanted pounds?

Research conducted for the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition states that a green tea diet can speed up your metabolism and oxidize fat without increasing your heart beat. This means that you can achieve a fast metabolism with green tea without suffering heart trouble. In other words, green tea enables you to increase your expenditure of energy without causing adverse health effects.

If you find the taste of green tea difficult to swallow, you can obtain green tea extract in a pill. The 500-milligram capsules should be consumed two or three times each day in order for you to receive maximum benefit.

Of course, you might be wondering at this point how much green tea is enough. Some medical experts recommend as many as ten cups a day. Other health specialists say that two to three cups are sufficient. Yet other medical experts recommend splitting the difference, calling for four to five cups of green tea daily.

Green tea reduces your "bad" cholesterol count, while enhancing your "good" cholesterol count. As a result, those who drink green tea can substantially increase their consumption of high cholesterol food, yet maintain a relatively low bad cholesterol count. Green tea can also decrease your blood sugar, protecting you against diabetes or at least reducing symptoms of diabetes.

A number of studies have been done in order to ascertain the benefits of green tea. For instance, researcher William Rumpler conducted a study in order to determine the effects of green tea consumption on men. The results indicated that the energy

expenditure for tea-drinkers was three percent higher after they ingested the tea. However, Rumpler and his colleagues believe additional research needs to be conducted in order to determine the full effect of green tea upon the human body.

Of course, in addition to weight loss, there are other advantages to the GreenTea diet. It is believed to be effective in preventing Alzheimer's disease, combating flu and colds, and boosting your immune system. As a result, a number of people drink the beverage strictly for its medicinal value.

On a segment of the "Oprah Winfrey" talk show, Dr. Nicholas Perricone said that if you replaced coffee with green tea, you could lose as many as ten pounds in six weeks. Perricone stated, "Coffee has organic acids that raise your blood sugar, raise insulin. Insulin puts a lock on body fat. When you switch over to green tea, you get your caffeine, you're all set, but you will drop your insulin levels and body fat will fall very rapidly. So 10 pounds in six weeks, I will guarantee it."

However, note that the physician is not prescribing green tea per se, but rather calling it preferable to coffee. However, it appears clear that green tea is a healthier beverage than coffee. A study published by the American Journal of Clinical Study reports that green tea promotes fat oxidation, and that this process appears to be the result of more than just the caffeine that is a component of the tea. In other words, there appear to be qualities inherent in green tea that foster fat oxidation.

It is interesting to note that some people wonder which is preferable: loose-leaf green tea that you buy online or the green tea that you can purchase at the supermarket. Generally speaking, supermarket green tea is considered lower in quality than green tea purchased over the Internet. It has been said that green tea offered on the Web also enables you to get the most out of your money.

It appears that green tea is more than just a passing fad. It has emerged as a legitimate health aid—a product which can help you lose weight over the long run. While there is no such thing as a magic fix for weight loss, you should consider adding green tea to your diet, not only for its weight loss value, but for its medicinal properties as well.

## **Losing Weight, the Jenny Craig Way**

Actress Kirstie Alley made headlines when she lost 50 pounds following the Jenny Craig weight program. As a result, Alley has become an outspoken advocate of this nutrition system. While Alley's weight loss may be surprising, you may be wondering whether you could duplicate her success. But, to begin with, you need to have an understanding of Jenny Craig, the company's claims, and whether the weight loss program is a sure-fire way to lose weight.

The company website notes that Jenny Craig is one of the biggest weight loss programs in the country. Company managers say that the program stresses good nutrition and moderate activity. As a result, company executives say, individuals can achieve their

weight loss goals by carefully following the program. Jenny Craig has more than 600 locations in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Puerto Rico. If you enroll in the program, you will receive a weight loss instruction book and you'll be able to locate a weight loss partner through an online bulletin board.

The program offers two general approaches to weight loss. With the first approach, you report to a Jenny Craig Center, where you'll receive individual consultations. The consultant will work with you to develop daily menus. You buy the diet food directly from the company. The second approach is an at-home program in which you have phone conversations with your consultant. You order your food every two weeks, with menus and other materials delivered to your home, within five to seven days after your order has been placed. Your consultant will take you through the program, answer any questions you may have, and attempt to ensure that your experience with Jenny Craig is a positive one.

Calorie counts on Jenny Craig depend on your individual requirements, but the daily calorie level will be at least 1200. Under the program, you should lose at least a pound a week or one percent of your total weight. The menus are designed according to the specifications of the Department of Agriculture's Food Pyramid. You can select from at least 70 different foods. The food has received the seal of approval from Jenny Craig's Medical Advisory Panel.

In her autobiography, entitled *The Jenny Craig Story*, Craig wrote, "When somebody makes a decision to go on a diet...they become almost totally preoccupied with food. We decided that if we provided the food, it would let the clients focus on their own bodies."

According to dietitians at Northwestern University, the Jenny Craig system does have its drawbacks. For instance, it offers little in the way of fiber, and those who follow the program may not consume enough iron and zinc. Consequently, the program may be difficult for women of child-bearing age who need a great deal of iron in their diet in order to prevent anemia. Also, since Jenny Craig supplies the food, clients do not learn how to prepare their own low-calorie meals. As a result, once you stop using Jenny Craig, you could find your weight skyrocketing upward. Moreover, Northwestern dietitians say that the company's counselors have limited training, meaning that the individual consultations with clients are less effective than they could be. In addition, there's little in the way of a support network for Jenny Craig clients, since there are no regular support group meetings. Because nine out of every ten Jenny Craig customers are women, men may not be comfortable taking part. Jenny Craig's weight maintenance program is also expensive--\$200 a year.

Is the Jenny Craig program appropriate for you? The answer depends largely on your personal preferences. If you do not want the hassle of having to shop for your own low-fat food, Jenny Craig offers an attractive option. Also, if you believe in a go-it-alone approach to weight loss, Jenny Craig may be perfectly acceptable. However, if you want professional weight loss advice, you do not like the idea of buying company food, and you want to meet and talk with other men or women who are trying to lose weight,

another program might be more appropriate. As always, talk at length with your doctor before beginning any serious weight loss program.

### The Mediterranean Diet: Healthy Dietary Advice from Across the Sea

The popularity of the Mediterranean Diet began with a rather simple equation: the people of Greece and Southern Italy tended to eat a diet rich in fat, yet had less cardiovascular disease than people in the U.S. How could this be? The answer seems to lie in the Mediterranean's reliance on the monosaturated fat known as olive oil. Olive oil forms the basis of Mediterranean cooking—it is the key ingredient in preparing everything from pasta to steak. Olive oil is also considered an antioxidant, so it can be effective in the fight against cancer.

However, following the Mediterranean Diet can be a challenge. While 40 percent of one's total calories are derived from fat, dieters can only eat small portions of red meat. Even fish and poultry are de-emphasized, as are milk and milk products. However, unlike other diets, the Mediterranean Diet allows you to eat a fair amount of bread and potatoes, and you can eat eggs as often as every other day. You can even drink wine in moderate amounts.

It should be pointed out that the Mediterranean Diet offers little in the way of saturated fat or trans fat. This means that dieters have to avoid certain oils as well as margarine, peanut butter, cakes and cookies. Dieters are also encouraged to cut the total amount of fat they eat each day.

A study conducted in France showed that people who had had at least one heart attack who planned their meals according to a Mediterranean diet were less likely to suffer from subsequent heart attacks than those who followed a typical diet recommended by the American Heart Association. Another study conducted last year indicated that those who used the Mediterranean diet, exercised, and abstained from smoking were less likely to die than those who followed a traditional diet.

However, not all the foods found in a typical Mediterranean Diet are considered healthy choices. For instance, cheese-rich lasagna and ravioli can be roadblocks to weight loss. In addition, tiramisu and cannoli can also cause an individual to pack on the pounds.

A number of dieticians recommend taking the best elements of the Mediterranean Diet and incorporating them into your lifestyle in order to achieve good health and weight loss. This means emphasizing vegetables in your diet, along with whole grains and nuts. You might be surprised to learn that the average Mediterranean consumes red meat less than twice a week. If you're following the Mediterranean path, you should also ban the butter and sugary snacks and opt for fruit when selecting a dessert.

But there are also other parts of the Mediterranean lifestyle which should be considered when you are attempting to lose weight. Mediterraneans tend to walk and

bike a great deal, which contributes to their calorie-burning. In addition, meals tend to be a leisurely affair. As a result, the body has time for proper digestion.

A typical Mediterranean menu would include cereal and banana for breakfast; minestrone soup and a slice of garlic bread for lunch; and pasta primavera and berries for dinner. One of the great advantages to the Mediterranean Diet is that it is a feast for the senses—the colors are bold, the flavors are enticing, and the aroma is unbeatable.

Cardiologist Michael Ozner has been recommending the Mediterranean Diet to his patients for almost 30 years. In response to the diet's popularity, Ozner published a book called *Miami Mediterranean Diet*, which offers hundreds of tips for cooking up Mediterranean specialties.

In addition to helping people lose weight, the Mediterranean Diet has been credited with improving longevity for people within the Mediterranean Basin. Therefore, the diet is considered a healthy, life-giving alternative to a number of other diets that are on the market today. But perhaps the diet's biggest selling point is the fact that dieters say it helps to satisfy their cravings—while enabling them to lose weight. Therefore, a number of people see the Mediterranean Diet as the ultimate “un-diet,” a weight management plan that doesn't scrimp on taste.

## **The Low-Cal Approach to Weight Loss**

Counting calories may seem old-fashioned today, given the proliferation of low-carb and high protein diets. However, a number of dietitians maintain that the low calorie approach is actually the best approach to weight loss. While it may seem trite, lowering the number of calories we consume can have a marked effect on our waistlines.

The majority of diets offer dieters 1,000 to 1,500 calories each day. Still, it would be wrong to assume that everyone who needs to lose weight should be on a 1,000 calorie diet. In fact, the amount of calories you need is a function of your current weight, your metabolism, and the amount of exercise you do. Diets recommended by doctors, as well as many of the meal programs found in diet books, are based upon a low-calorie model.

When dieting, you should assume that you will lose only about a pound a week. However, during the initial stages of your diet, you may find that you are actually losing more weight than that because you are losing water. While you can use a standardized diet, it is perhaps best to work with a dietician in order to fine-tune the diet to meet your individual needs.

Still, even if you are curbing your calorie count, you'll need to make sure that what you eat is nutritious. By paying close attention to nutrition labels, you can determine the vitamin and mineral count of much of what you consume. There are certain general requirements for a healthy diet. For instance, you'll need to make sure that you are getting enough protein. For the typical woman, this would amount to 50 grams per day; for the typical man, 63 grams per day. Protein is vitally important for strengthening your

muscles and teeth and maintaining good skin tone. Protein sources can include lean meat, fish, chicken, eggs, beans, and nuts. Experts recommend that you have at least two servings of protein a day.

While low carb diets may be all the rage, a number of dieticians say you need as many as 100 grams of carbohydrates a day. This means consuming as many as eleven servings of pasta, cereal, and bread in order to maintain a healthy energy level. You should also eat at least 20 grams of fiber each day to aid your digestion. Less than a third of your calories should come from fat in order to enable you to keep the pounds off. Only about one-tenth of your calories should be derived from saturated fat. Also, keep your cholesterol count under control in order to keep heart disease at bay.

An important aspect of good nutrition that many individuals forget is water. This might be surprising, however, given the fact that most of our body is made up of H<sub>2</sub>O. Medical experts by and large agree that you should drink at least eight glasses of water everyday. Exercise, however, could make you yearn for additional water. Water is often considered the secret weapon of weight loss, enabling people to shed pounds more easily.

Although it may be tempting, you should not skip meals. This only serves to decrease your metabolism, causing you to burn fat more slowly. Even a small meal is better than no meal at all. Weight loss experts, however, differ about the number of meals you should eat each day. Some recommend the standard three meals with a couple of snacks, while others recommend five or six small meals each day. You should probably check with your physician to see which approach is appropriate for you.

Losing weight can be a difficult challenge, no matter what your age. There are so many temptations around, so many opportunities to boost your calorie count. Also, you might try to follow one diet, only to find that it is difficult to sustain. As a result, the low-calorie diet may be the best method around for consistent weight loss. While you might not be able to lose weight quickly, you can shed pounds eventually. By being patient and committed to your weight loss program, you can ultimately lose the weight you need to.

### **NutriSystem: Weight Loss is All in the Planning**

Beef Stroganoff with noodles...basil chicken with tomato sauce...tuna casserole...turkey with dumplings. These might not sound like diet foods, but they are, according to the NutriSystem diet program. The program offers separate pre-packaged food plans for women in general, men in general, diabetics, and vegetarians. And, according to medical research, dieters who use a plan such as NutriSystem lose 30 percent more weight over a period of four months than people who follow other weight loss programs.

Visit the NutriSystem website at [www.nutrisystem.com](http://www.nutrisystem.com), and you'll find a number of testimonials from successful dieters. For instance, there's Janet Z, who lost 24 pounds

and is quoted as saying, “My favorite thing about the NutriSystem program is the convenience of it all, the variety of food, and the fact that this Italian girl can eat pasta every night if she wants to!”

And then there is Nicole S., who lost 28 pounds. Nicole states, “I thought it was extremely easy. I carried them in my bag and there were plenty of choices. I never got bored and I’d say that it’s foolproof.”

The NutriSystem plan offers you food that ranks at the low end of the Glycemic Index, which determines the effect of carbohydrates on blood sugar. Those foods that lead to stable blood sugar have a low Glycemic Index ranking. The idea is that, by following the NutriSystem program, you will end up burning fat. The plan requires you to eat five times a day in order to speed up your metabolism.

Originally, Dr. Jay Satz began the NutriSystem program as a diet plan which offered dieters only 400 to 500 calories per day of nutrition. Today, the calorie allowance at NutriSystem is much more generous. The program offers 140 different meals, from pancakes to fettuccini alfredo, and from cheesy potatoes to chili with beans. Satz himself is partial to the chicken marsala for his main entrée and chocolate crunches for dessert.

Backers of the NutriSystem program say that it offers appropriate nutrition, enabling an individual to lose weight without sacrificing valuable nutrients. The food portions are determined for you, so you do not have to worry about eating too much. Also, since the food is sent right to your home, the program receives high marks in the convenience category.

There is no need to visit a NutriSystem center, although you can call a weight loss counselor for support. Membership is free and includes unlimited counseling, newsletters, online classes, a computerized weight control diary, and online chat rooms. Also, when you enroll in the program, you will receive a complimentary diet analysis.

With the NutriSystem program, you end up eating 55 percent of your calories from low-glycemic carbs, 25 percent from protein, and 20 percent from fat. The plan is low in sodium and derives less than five percent of its calories from trans and saturated fats. The meat tends to be lean and low-fat, while whole grain foods are also plentiful in the meal plan. Under NutriSystem’s guidance, you’ll eat more than four cups of fruits and vegetables a day—the amount advised by federal health officials.

Another advantage to the NutriSystem program is that it enables you to plan meals far in advance. Generally speaking, you begin with four weeks’ worth of products, enabling you to have enough meals and snacks for a full 28 days. If you choose, however, you can order as much as ten weeks’ worth of food.

Primary advantages to the NutriSystem plan include the fact that it is highly easy to use, since you will have food delivered directly to your door. The menus also tend to be

rich in nutrients, making the meals a healthy choice. One of the major disadvantages, however, is that you will not learn how to shop for healthy food or learn how to prepare it, since the choices are made for you. Also, you may not like the NutriSystem food, which may make it difficult to stick with the program. In addition, the program can cost you hundreds of dollars—an investment you might not be prepared to make. Moreover, some health experts say that you are far better off working with a registered dietician than trying to follow a prepackaged meal plan.

### **Eat More and Lose Weight with the Ornish Diet**

In 1993, Dr. Dean Ornish came out with a book entitled *Eat More, Weigh Less*. The primary focus of the book was to urge people to boost their consumption of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables while decreasing their consumption of fat. Ornish subsequently made headlines by becoming a dietary consultant to McDonald's, helping the hamburger giant to develop the fruit and walnut salad which now appears on the restaurant's re-vamped menu.

Ornish's work began in 1977 when he was studying ways to combat heart attacks. He hypothesized that heart disease could be successfully treated by cutting the fat in a patient's diet, as well as reducing the amount of unrefined carbohydrates he or she consumes. During his research, he noticed that his patients lost about 25 pounds each and managed to maintain the weight loss for five years.

Ornish offers two different diets, the Reversal Diet and the Prevention Diet. Those who suffer from heart disease and who are trying to decrease their risk of another heart attack would conceivably benefit from the Reversal Diet, while the Prevention Diet is designed for people who have high cholesterol levels, but who have not developed heart disease. Both versions are vegetarian, consisting of 10 percent fat, 20 percent protein, and 70 percent carbohydrates.

If you decide to follow the Ornish diet, you will be eating a great deal of fiber, little fat, and a great deal of vegetables. Under the Ornish program, you can eat as many beans, fruits, grains, and vegetables as you want. However, non-fat dairy products such as milk, cheese, and yogurt should be eaten sparingly. The same holds true for fat-free desserts and yogurt bars.

Still, under the Ornish plan, you will be giving up a great deal. For instance, you will not be permitted to eat meat of any kind, including fish and chicken. You must also pass up oils, avocados, olives, nuts, sugar, and anything that consists of more than two grams of fat for each serving. The diet also forbids the consumption of alcohol. The doctor recommends eating a number of small meals so that you will feel hungry less often. Following this plan, less than ten percent of your calories should come from fat.

Ornish recommends at least 30 minutes of exercise each day, or an hour of exercise three times each week. He also encourages some type of stress management, such as meditation, massage, or yoga. Why? In his book, Ornish writes, "When your soul is

fed, you have less need to overeat. When you directly experience the fullness of life, then you have less need to fill the void with food.”

Supporters of the Ornish plan are enthusiastic about its effect on the body. It can successfully combat heart disease, prevent cancer, alleviate the symptoms of diabetes, and help stabilize high blood pressure. In fact, one doctor has said that the Ornish program succeeds because it has a clear scientific basis. Also, the diet is convenient to follow because it does not involve counting calories.

The major disadvantage of the Ornish plan is that it is highly restrictive. This can make it difficult to stay with over the long haul. A number of dieters may be uncomfortable eating food that is so low-fat. The diet also represents a radical change from the typical American meat-and-potatoes fare.

In addition, Ornish fails to recognize that some types of fats are actually good for one’s health. For instance, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated oils can protect against heart disease. Therefore, Ornish’s prohibitions against fish and nut consumption would seem to be counter-productive.

Is the Ornish diet worth the trouble? If you must not only manage your weight but struggle with heart disease as well, it might be just the diet you need. Also, if you have medical reasons for losing weight, the program is certainly one you should consider. However, if you have difficulty sticking with specific menus—and you love meat—the Ornish diet may be too hard to deal with. When you decide to undertake the Ornish diet, you are making a commitment to vegetarianism. The diet provides you with less protein than the typical diet, which could sap your energy. Thus, a good rule of thumb is to discuss the plan with your family physician to determine if it’s appropriate for your case.

### **Slim-Fast: Drinking Your Way to Weight Loss**

You may have seen one of the ever-present cans in the grocery store and been tempted to pick it up. Yet, you’re not sure whether Slim-Fast will be effective in helping you to lose weight. You should know that the Slim-Fast program is considered quite successful in the fight against fat—although not everyone is sold on the plan.

Nearly thirty years ago, S. Daniel Abraham revolutionized weight loss programs with the Slim-Fast drink. According to the company website, Slim-Fast represents a sensible way to slim down. In fact, more than two dozen medical studies indicate that the diet program is a winning formula for losing weight. Slim-Fast is considered to be a nutritionally-balanced plan, offering dieters proteins, carbohydrates, and a healthy amount of fat.

One of the recommendations of the Slim-Fast program is its convenience. You can drink on the run, enabling you to fit nutrition into your busy day. In addition, the program is considered far less expensive than other diet plans, particularly pre-packaged diet plans such as NutriSystem and Jenny Craig. Slim-Fast also now offers more variety.

In addition to all the different flavors of shakes it offers, Slim-Fast also provides dieters with soup, pasta, and nutrition bars. In all, Slim-Fast now features more than a hundred different products. If you follow the Slim-Fast plan, you will need to eat three meals each day, along with three snacks made up of fruits and vegetables. Two of the meals and one snack must be made up of Slim-Fast products. Because of the frequency with which you'll be eating, you shouldn't suffer from hunger pains. One study actually showed that individuals who used Slim-Fast over a period of a decade were 33 pounds lighter than dieters who did not use Slim-Fast products.

Another advantage to the Slim-Fast program is that you don't have to worry about counting calories, cooking meals, or figuring out portion sizes. Slim-Fast has, in essence, done the work for you. Also, you can now choose between two different Slim-Fast programs: the Optima Diet and the Plan for a Low-Carb Lifestyle.

The company's website contends that the program is a proven weight loss tool. Dieters have had success in maintaining their weight over one to five years' duration. A spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association has called the website "user-friendly." By visiting the site, you can be put in touch with registered dieticians who can answer your concerns. The website also offers a support group, which can be a critical factor in maintaining weight loss over the long term.

Slim-Fast's goals as far as weight loss is concerned follow government guidelines. The idea is to lose ten percent of one's weight over six months, meaning that one would shed no more than two pounds a week. Slim-Fast's plan calls for only 30 minutes of exercise a day, which seems entirely doable. Dieters may also be inspired by the success stories posted on the company's website.

However, there are disadvantages to the Slim-Fast program. For instance, if you don't like the taste of the shakes or food, you could find it difficult to continue with the meal plan. Also, some people report feeling hungry, despite eating the recommended portions of food. Slim-Fast, in essence, does the thinking for you, so, for the most part, you do not get the experience of shopping for wholesome food for yourself. You might also tire of the program quickly, causing you to gain back the weight you initially lost. While Slim-Fast may be effective for the short-term, it is a difficult program to maintain for life.

As a result, Slim-Fast gets mixed reviews—even from members of the medical community. While some dieticians are fans of meal replacement programs, others see them as potentially harmful and nutritionally inadequate. Whether you can effectively lose weight with Slim-Fast depends upon whether you have the discipline and desire to remain with the program for the long-term. If you start to use Slim-Fast for a while, then stop, you will likely gain back the weight you initially lost. However, for decades now, Slim-Fast has been winning the hearts of dieters and the company shows no signs of slowing down in the near future. Slim-Fast may be one way that you can drink yourself to optimum weight loss.

## **Sugar Busters: The Diet Sensation**

If you love your sugary sodas and oh-so-sweet chocolate cream pies, you know how difficult it is to restrict the amount of sugar in your diet. However, eliminating sugar can be critical to effective weight loss. That, at least, is the theory behind the diet known as Sugar Busters. While some experts consider this diet to be instrumental in helping people shed unwanted pounds, critics contend that it is just another dietary fad.

There are a number of misconceptions about Sugar Busters. It does not consider carbohydrates to be the enemy, and it is not oozing with fat. The Sugar Busters formula is 40/30/30, or 40 percent carbs, 30 percent protein and 30 percent fat. That means that the diet does not ban carbs; it simply urges people to consume nutritious carbs. While dieters may consume a great deal of protein, it is not considered to be strictly a high-protein diet.

Those on the Sugar Busters plan eat a fair amount of grain, which enables the intestines to work properly and can also reduce blood sugar and cholesterol levels. In fact, the amount of fiber consumed is considered to be one of the diet's biggest attributes. Fiber has also been credited with helping the body to maintain healthy weight loss.

Of course, the key ingredient of Sugar Busters is the reduction in an individual's sugar intake. While this may be difficult at first, medical experts say that, after an extended period of time without sugar, an individual will no longer crave it. Therefore, you can truly kiss those banana splits goodbye, once you go on the Sugar Busters plan.

What you may not realize is all that sugar entails. It includes corn syrup, dextrose, sucrose, and honey. In other words, to the layman, it includes not only sugar, but a number of sugar substitutes. About the only permitted sugars are the lactose found in milk and the fructose which appears in fruit.

Of course, Sugar Busters has both assets and liabilities. On the plus side, it eliminates unhealthy sugary foods from one's diet. It allows an extensive array of protein-rich foods; therefore, you're less likely to feel unsatisfied. It also encourages healthy sugar consumption in the form of fruit. In addition, proponents of the Sugar Busters plan encourage dieters to drink a great deal of water which helps to flush out the system.

But there are also flaws in the Sugar Busters plan. Critics maintain that it places too much emphasis on cutting sugar, and not enough on reducing one's intake of other unhealthy food. Also, it restricts the consumption of some fruits and vegetables, causing dieters to lose valuable vitamins and minerals. At the same time, detractors say, it encourages far too much consumption of protein, which can result in kidney damage. Moreover, some dieticians maintain that the only effective way to lose weight is by cutting calories, not simply by zapping sugar from the diet.

And there are other things to consider with Sugar Busters as well. For instance, if you follow the program religiously, you may be deprived of vitamin D, as well as calcium. You could also see your bad cholesterol levels skyrocket because of the protein-rich foods you are eating. Sugar Busters has also been linked to heart disease and osteoporosis. And then there's the obvious problem: it's simply difficult to give up candy, cookies, bread, and other treats, even if you want to be committed to the program.

It is also important to note that the authors of Sugar Busters do not guarantee a specific amount of weight loss. If you try to follow the program and you fail to lose weight, the plan's supporters maintain that you have probably indulged in too many carbohydrates. This may or may not be true; the point is that following the program can be a challenge for anyone—even the most disciplined dieter. However, if you're not fond of sweets, you enjoy high-protein foods, and you can live without many carbohydrates, Sugar Busters may be the right plan for you. The best advice may be to try it and see if it yields results—without jeopardizing your health in the process.

### **Diet Plan in a Bun: The Subway Approach**

For many of us, fast food is the only food at lunchtime. We're in a tremendous hurry to get back to our workday, so we choose food based on convenience rather than nutritional value. In recent years, a number of fast food outlets have attempted to add more health-conscious selections to their menu; for the most part, these consist of salads and fruit cups. While they may have fewer calories than standard fast food, they may not be as tasty.

Yet, in many cities, there is an alternative to the regular burger-and-salad fare: Subway, a restaurant which specializes in six inch and foot-long submarine sandwiches. At first glance, you wouldn't think of Subway as being a dieter's delight—there is all that carbohydrate-rich bread and fat-filled cheeses. However, to Jared Fogle, Subway is like diet Nirvana. That's because Jared lost 245 pounds through what he calls the Subway diet. His routine consisted of a six-inch turkey sub, sans mayonnaise and cheese, potato chips, and a diet drink for lunch. Dinner consisted of a foot-long veggie sub, also without condiments, and more diet cola. As a result of his experience, Jared has become a spokesman for Subway.

As far as exercise is concerned, Jared avoided it at the beginning. Weighing more than 400 pounds, he found it difficult to move. However, as he began losing weight, he started walking to his college classes instead of taking the bus. Eventually, he began walking 1.5 miles each day.

One of the key ingredients of Jared's Subway diet is convenience. It is relatively simple to walk to a Subway restaurant and order subs twice a day. You don't have to spend time shopping for food and preparing meals. If you enjoy sub sandwiches, you may find the diet easy to maintain. Since you will be consuming only about 1,000 calories, weight reduction is also guaranteed. Thus, it might be one of the most effective diets in existence today.

Of course, there are disadvantages to the Subway diet. For instance, eating the same type of subs each day can be repetitive and difficult to stomach. Also, you may lose out on vital vitamins and minerals such as vitamin D and zinc. In addition, the diet offers nothing in the way of breakfast, so you will be sacrificing the nutrients that a healthy breakfast can provide. In addition, the Subway diet can be an expensive one to follow, since you'll have to purchase all those sub sandwiches.

However, it's possible that you can vary Jared's diet and still lose weight. Subway offers a number of sandwiches with six grams of fat or less. These include the six inch ham (290 calories), the six-inch chicken breast (330 calories), the six-inch roast beef (290 calories), the six-inch club (320 calories), the sweet onion chicken teriyaki (380 calories), the turkey breast (280 calories), turkey breast and ham (290 calories), and veggie delite (230 calories). Subway also offers carb-conscious wraps as an alternative to sub buns. These include the chicken bacon ranch wrap, tuna wrap, turkey and bacon melt, and turkey breast wrap. In addition, the restaurant chain now offers a number of salads which are also a healthy alternative to normal fast food fare.

One of the great advantages to Subway is the large amount of fresh vegetables which you can add to your sandwich. You can choose such items as spinach, tomatoes, lettuce, olives, green peppers, and sweet peppers. You can change the types of vegetables you use each day in order to add variety to your meal.

The critical problem with any Subway-based diet is the discipline required. Day after day, you have to limit your food intake to what is available at the Subway counter. This can be quite a challenge. While you can choose from different lunch meats, and you can combine subs with salads, you are still quite limited in your menu choices.

Is the Subway diet right for you? If you really love subs and hate to cook, Subway may offer just the meal plan you're looking for. However, if you are not fond of subs and you want a lot of variety in your diet, you'll have to pass up the Subway plan for another diet.

## **Eating the Sugar-Free Way**

Perhaps your weakness is pistachio ice cream, brownies with nuts, or pancakes covered with syrup. Many of us crave sweets—sometimes throughout the day. Some of us may even be addicted to sugar. The problem is, large helpings of sugary foods can lead to substantial weight gain. But eating sugar-free does not necessarily guarantee weight loss.

A food may be sugar-free and still contain a great amount of calories and carbohydrates. You may be thinking that you can lose weight simply by using sugar substitutes. However, this is a naïve way of thinking, since some sugar substitutes increase your intake of both calories and carbs. For instance, the sugar substitute

fructose adds calories and carbs to your daily diet. These types of sugar substitutes are often called sugar alcohols or polyols.

It should be stated that polyols can be highly beneficial. For instance, while they offer a sugary taste, they have fewer calories than sugar. They are particularly advantageous for people with diabetes and, unlike sugar, they do not cause tooth decay. You can find polyols in a number of baked goods and candies. Interestingly enough, they can even be found in mouthwashes.

Given the fact that polyols are low-cal, they can be helpful in a weight management program. Fortunately, there are a number of desserts that are both sugar-free and delicious. For instance, sugar-free lemon cheesecake is a healthy alternative to the typical high-calorie cheesecake. You can also make butterscotch and pumpkin pudding by using sugar-free butterscotch pudding mix.

A sugar-free version of Old-Fashioned Applesauce cake is made with reduced calorie margarine, Splenda, and unsweetened applesauce, while light chocolate peanut butter pie can be created with sugar-free chocolate pudding and fat-free whipped dessert topping. Meanwhile, sugar-free strawberry pie can be made with diet Sprite or 7-Up and sugar-free strawberry gelatin.

The American Diabetes Association heartily endorses sugar-free diets. The organization also recommends consuming at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day; a half-dozen servings of breads and cereals; no more than three servings of low-fat milk or yogurt, lean meats; and a limited amount of sweets and desserts.

When you dine in restaurants, the Diabetes Association recommends that you save half your meal for the next day in order to avoid calorie overload. You might also consider sharing a meal or dessert with someone else. Also, you might want to substitute a salad for potatoes. In addition, you should ask that your dressing or sauce be served on the side in order to attempt to control portions.

It is interesting to note that a food can be labeled “no sugar added” and still contain sugar. The label refers to the fact that no table sugar is involved; however, the food could still have its share of natural sugars. As a result, no-sugar-added food could have as many calories as other types of food. In addition, the Diabetes Association cautions that eating protein alone will not enhance your muscles. Rather, you need exercise to strengthen your muscles.

While eating sugar-free food can be beneficial, the Diabetes Association offers other tips for attempting to lose weight and keep it off. In general, the guidelines call for reducing calories and fat, exercising each day, not skipping breakfast, and maintaining a food log which indicates everything you have consumed on a daily basis.

Lessening your dependence on sugar can be an important first step toward improving your diet. But, as we have seen, simply eating sugar-free will not guarantee

that you will achieve the weight loss you're looking for. Weight reduction takes a great deal of discipline and patience. You did not gain all of your extra weight in a single day, so you can't expect to be rid of it instantaneously.

Before cutting out sugar entirely from your diet, it's best to check with your doctor. He or she can also give you some effective weight management techniques. It's always best to have a medical doctor overseeing your weight loss plan. That can help to ensure that you maintain good health during the weight reduction process. With dedication and hard work, you can achieve your weight loss goals. You yourself may be astounded at your progress, once you begin a sensible diet plan.

### **The Weight Watchers Approach: It's All in the Points**

Michael C., a CEO who lives in the northeast, has lost 50 pounds since he joined Weight Watchers a few months ago. He credits the program with helping him to achieve his ideal weight. He also feels more energetic and healthier as a result of his experience with Weight Watchers. Thanks to Weight Watchers, he is no longer self-conscious when it comes to taking family photographs. In addition, he has received numerous compliments from his family and friends as a result of his weight loss.

Weight Watchers has been part of the American vocabulary for decades. The organization has become synonymous with weight loss. All across America, people are planning their daily menus according to Weight Watchers' innovative point system, which assigns a certain number of points to different foods based on calories, fiber, fat, and serving size. For instance, a Quarter Pounder with cheese from McDonald's is 13 points; corn on the cob is 3. Each day, dieters attempt to stay within their maximum point range in order to lose weight.

There are a number of advantages to the Weight Watchers program. For instance, its point system is easy to follow—much easier than counting calories. Also, the program represents a holistic approach which includes not only sound nutrition, but also a sensible exercise program. In addition, dieters get a chance to meet with other dieters, who can form a network of support. On the Weight Watchers plan, few people complain of feeling tired or hungry. A number of nutritionists heartily endorse the Weight Watchers program because of its balanced approach. Interestingly enough, no food is banned under the Weight Watchers program; however, if you want to indulge in a piece of banana cream pie, you might not have many points left for the rest of your day. Yet another advantage to the Weight Watchers program is that you can buy Weight Watchers food at your local supermarket. This aspect makes the program especially convenient.

Certainly, some people, such as Michael C. and the Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, have lost an appreciable amount of weight using the Weight Watchers program. However, the vast majority of people only lose about six pounds—hardly enough for an individual who is considered to be obese. It's a fact that you won't see advertised in Weight Watchers literature. In fact, only 5 percent of dieters are able to maintain their weight loss over five years using the Weight Watchers system.

Other individuals find the Weight Watchers program too expensive to use. In addition to the registration fee, there is an additional weekly fee you must pay. Also, some individuals find little comfort in the weekly meetings—they feel that the other dieters often seem to be more competitive than supportive. The point system can also cause dieters to become preoccupied with food, hurting their relationships with other people. Once you leave the Weight Watchers program, you might find it extremely difficult to maintain your weight loss. Also, if you don't succeed in losing weight in the first few weeks, you may become frustrated and quit the program altogether.

Interestingly enough, Weight Watchers has won an endorsement from an unexpected source—the restaurant chain known as Applebee's. Applebee's now offers Weight Watchers entrees on its menus. These dishes include a tortilla chicken melt (10 points), onion soup au gratin (three points), and chocolate raspberry layer cake (four points), among other entrees.

Another advantage to the Weight Watchers program is that you can find the point values of a number of fast foods online. This means that you are not choosing your food in the dark—you have some idea what these foods can do to your waistline. Any weight loss program that improves your knowledge of nutrition should be considered beneficial.

Choosing a weight loss program is an extremely personal decision, one that should not be taken lightly. You will have to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of the Weight Watchers program in order to decide whether it's the right plan for you. However, if you do select Weight Watchers, be sure to remain committed to it for at least six months in an effort to maximize your weight loss.

## **The Ultimate Weight Loss Solution**

If you are a fan of TV talk show host Oprah Winfrey, you probably knew about Dr. Phil McGraw some time ago. The advice guru is a favorite of Oprah's because of his uncanny ability to "tell it like it is." Dr. Phil has used the same no-nonsense approach on his own television program and has also introduced millions to a new perspective on dieting with his ultimate weight loss solution.

Dr. Phil's approach may not be revolutionary, but it is instructive. He preaches the gospel of healthy choices. This means understanding the emotions that cause you to overeat in the first place. He also offers tests to help you assess your own eating patterns. Once you understand how your mind works, you can begin the daunting task of changing your environment.

Dr. Phil argues that, while you may not be able to control circumstances, you can control your reaction to the difficulties that come your way. This means taking ownership of your responses and leaving little to chance. Such a stance can be quite empowering and can give you the confidence you need to succeed at weight loss.

Another aspect of Dr. Phil's plan is to resolve to quit complaining. You need to realize that your situation will never get better if you simply complain about it. Rather, you need to take decisive action. You also have to realize that you can have an impact on your own weight—that your weight problems are not the other guy's fault.

Your primary task is to rid your own personal world of the temptations that cause you to binge. After that, you need to devote your attention to nutritional concerns. Dr. Phil also believes in establishing a healthy system of exercise that can help you lose weight over the long term.

Dr. Phil also believes that it is important for you to establish a support network that will enable you to reach your weight loss goals. The importance of support cannot be overemphasized. It is difficult to accomplish anything in life without someone in your corner, cheering you on. The same is certainly true when it comes to weight reduction. You'll want a partner, someone you can turn to when the desire to overeat becomes overwhelming.

An interesting part of Dr. Phil's plan is the self-assessment. During his practice, Dr. Phil has found that some individuals sabotage their own diet success. They may actually feel uncomfortable about losing weight; therefore, they lose weight only to gain it back again. They may not be comfortable with the compliments they get from the opposite sex when they lose weight, so they hold onto their weight as a buffer against the outside world. As a result, Dr. Phil recommends that individuals slow down and take stock of themselves before going onto a weight loss program. During this slow-down period, they may identify those behaviors that keep them from having weight loss success.

Dr. Phil also recommends conducting a reality check from time to time. Challenge your own beliefs and pre-conceived ideas. See if they stand up to scrutiny. If not, it may be time to change your perspective about life in general and about weight loss in particular. Dr. Phil also suggests that you seek closure for the emotional issues in your life. This might mean attacking your own anger, or forgiving someone who has hurt you. With this closure, you can ready yourself to handle the challenge of losing weight.

Supporters of Dr. Phil's plan say that it is a common sense approach to weight loss. They applaud Dr. Phil for tackling the emotional issues surrounding weight gain. However, critics contend that there is nothing new or all that interesting in Dr. Phil's approach, that it covers ground that has been covered time and time again. In the end, you'll probably have to do your own research to determine if Dr. Phil's approach will work for you, or if another method would be better. The one positive aspect of Dr. Phil's prescription is that it is unlikely to harm you, and could actually do you a world of good.

## **Eating in the Zone—A Revolutionary Diet Choice**

One of the most revolutionary diet ideas to come along is something called the Zone, which was originated by Barry Sears, Ph.D. The Zone is based on the idea that we

should return to the diets of ancient peoples—diets which stress fruits, vegetables, and meat. The diet does not deny people carbohydrates, but simply limits their use. Dieters are encouraged to sharply curtail their intake of pasta and potatoes. The Zone works according to a formula of 40/30/30, meaning 40 percent carbohydrates, 30 percent fat, and 30 percent protein.

There is a physiological basis to the Zone. Dr. Sears developed the diet in an effort to limit the amount of insulin in the body. This is because a large amount of insulin can lead to a build up of fat, causing obesity and other medical problems. People on the diet are encouraged to obtain their carbohydrates from fruits and vegetables and their fat from olive oil and other monounsaturated fats.

The biggest advantage to the Zone diet is that it can lead to significant weight loss. It is also healthier than some diets, since it eliminates non-nutritious carbohydrates and emphasizes fruits and vegetables. The diet encourages people to eat often—at least every five hours. It is also a low-calorie diet; the typical female dieter will consume only about 1300 calories at most following the Zone. Another positive aspect of the Zone is that it discourages consumption of junk food, which may be the basis of much weight gain.

Some dieticians heartily endorse the Zone, while others dismiss it as being too difficult to follow. The diet can also be costly, because of its heavy reliance on protein products. In addition, some critics see the Zone as being too complex, forcing dieters to spend too much time trying to do various calculations.

But perhaps the biggest disadvantage of the Zone is its high protein content. Such a diet has been linked to heart disease and is actually condemned by the American Heart Association. In addition, the Heart Association questions whether the Zone is actually effective in enabling an individual to lose weight over the long term.

It has been said that the Zone diet is the polar opposite of a vegetarian diet. This is curious, considering that vegetarians are generally healthy and are less likely to suffer from heart disease. The fact that vegetarians tend to be slim also seems to poke a hole through Dr. Sears' theory that starchy vegetables can lead to weight gain.

People tend to gravitate to the Zone because it offers them the opportunity to indulge in foods that would be restricted on other diets. Also, the diet can be more filling than other weight loss plans. The problem, however, is that a number of the claims made about the Zone are unproven. As a result, despite Dr. Sears' research, the diet has been dismissed as a fad in some quarters.

Dr. Sears contends that people are overweight because of insulin resistance; however, it is difficult to verify his claims. It would appear that people are fat for all sorts of reasons—because of family history of obesity, eating patterns, emotional eating, and lack of nutritional knowledge. As a result, it might be said that Dr. Sears' diet is based upon a false assumption.

The Zone benefits from a number of celebrity endorsements. Actresses in Hollywood credit the Zone with helping them to lose weight. On average, a dieter can expect to lose five pounds during the initial two weeks and one pound a week after that introductory period.

Still, some critics charge that the Zone takes the fun out of eating. Whether this is true or not depends upon the opinion of the individual dieter. However, one thing is clear: the Zone is a diet phenomenon. Love it or hate it, it's one of the hottest diet trends on the market today. And it appears that, despite some negative publicity, the Zone is here to stay. As always, you should check with your physician before starting any weight loss regimen. He or she will closely monitor your progress and can determine whether you are suffering any ill effects as a result of your diet.

## **Why Your Diet May Not Be Working**

Jennifer, a middle-aged single mother with one six-year-old daughter, has been skipping sweets for a few weeks now. She's also become a stickler for portion control. She feels as if she's eating less than ever, and she's been diligently exercising for an hour at a time at least four days a week. Yet, she hasn't lost a single pound. The question is, "Why?"

This is a dilemma which affects dieters the world over. They think they are taking the steps necessary to lose weight, but nothing seems to be happening. In essence, they are trapped in a dieting rut and they don't know how to free themselves. As a result, they become frustrated and depressed and may then engage in binge eating.

One of the problems with diets is that they are often standardized. As a result, they don't take into consideration your individual physiology and metabolism. They provide a cookie-cutter approach to weight loss—an approach which may not work in your individual case. As a result, an increasing number of people are turning to dieticians to formulate a person weight loss strategy for them. This process has been made easier through the Internet, where you can correspond with a dietician any time of the day or night via e-mail. The dietician can also act as your personal coach, helping you through your dieting dilemmas.

Another reason that you may be failing at your diet is because of a lack of support. You may have family members who can eat whatever they want and seemingly not gain a pound. As a result, they may fill your refrigerator with junk food, leading you into temptation. Also, you may feel as if you have no one to turn to in order to discuss your weight problems. In order to solve this problem, many individuals look to psychotherapists to help them with their food-related issues. This can be particularly important if an individual has turned to purging in an effort to combat their weight problems. Bulimia is a serious disease which must be treated in order to ensure the good health of the patient. Thankfully, there are a number of treatment programs throughout the U.S. specifically focusing on bulimia.

Yet another reason for diet failure is hidden calories. You may literally be consuming calories and not even realize it. For instance, the frappuccinos that are so popular today are loaded with calories—as many as 600 in a single serving! You may also be indulging in sugary sodas—another source of extra calories. By taking a few simple steps, such as eliminating the exotic coffee drinks from your diet and substituting skim milk for whole milk, you may be able to eliminate the hidden calories that are denying you dieting success.

Lack of consistency can also be a diet-killer. You might go on a diet for a while, then quit before you've made any measurable progress. It's only natural to want to see quick results. The problem is that healthy weight loss involves losing only a couple of pounds a week. That means you'll have to stay on your diet for months before you see appreciable weight loss. Discouraging? It can be, but if you keep a positive attitude you can achieve your ideal weight.

You may also be more successful in your dieting if you consider it to be a lifestyle change. Therefore, your diet becomes a meal plan for life. This means that you must change the way you look at food. It is designed to be fuel for your body, and nothing more. As a result, you should not turn to food to make you feel better or to provide you with a sense of comfort. A lifestyle change implies commitment; it means that you are prepared to follow the plan for the long haul. If you feel as if you cannot be on your diet for any appreciable length of time, perhaps it's time to consider a different diet. Your aim ultimately should be not simply to lose weight, but to become healthier. A fad diet will not allow you to reach that milestone. Therefore, you must choose your diet carefully.

## **Turn Off the Tube and Watch the Pounds Melt Away**

Television is America's most popular form of entertainment. Every night, millions of viewers tune in to catch an episode of their favorite law-and-order show, game show, or sitcom. And America's love affair with television shows no signs of abating anytime soon. Screens are getting bigger; reality shows are proliferating; and television has quickly become the top source of information for the average American.

But television also has its downside. It has been linked to reading problems in children, attention deficit disorder, and crime. It's been called the ultimate time-waster—a blinking box of little aesthetic or literary value. And now there's research to suggest that television may also cause weight gain in children.

A study conducted at Stanford University a few years ago showed that children who reduced the amount of time they spent watching television were leaner than those who did not curtail their viewing time. Given the fact that obesity among youngsters is on the increase, tube time is a significant public health concern. It has been shown that children who are overweight are at greater risk of suffering from heart disease and hypertension.

Therefore, anything that promotes weight gain should be eliminated from children's lives—and television certainly falls into that category.

For most children, watching TV involves more than just viewing cartoons. It means playing video games, watching music videos, watching videotapes, and general channel surfing. It has been estimated that the average American watches as much as four hours of television a day—a large amount, by any measurement. Children's dependence on television may be difficult to break, given the fact that television is so much a part of the American culture.

There are other reasons why television may promote obesity. Children's programming is filled with commercials touting sugary cereals and candy bars. It has been shown that children are heavily influenced by television advertising; therefore, they are far more likely to indulge in sweets after watching television on a Saturday morning. Since freedom of speech makes it difficult to ban commercials featuring non-nutritious foods, it is up to parents to monitor their children's television viewing. Also, parents need to steer clear of the sugary cereal aisle when going grocery shopping.

Another reason that television is linked to obesity is because it promotes inactivity. Many people watch television by lounging on a sofa, bed, or futon. They can burn few calories in a prone position. Also, the fact that they're watching television means that they are not engaging in physical activities such as exercise. Television promotes a sedentary lifestyle that leads to additional weight gain.

But how can you effectively fight television? Some families have actually thrown out their TVs in the ultimate show of defiance. If you aren't ready to take such a drastic step, you might consider limiting your family's viewing time to a single hour each day. Another idea is to hold a "no TV" night where you encourage your children to engage in sports, games, and other activities. Forcing your children to plan their viewing can be another effective step. That way, they won't waste precious time cruising through the TV channels.

It is true that television cannot shoulder the entire blame for childhood obesity. However, medical research has now shown it is a contributing factor. There are also indications that excessive computer use can also contribute to weight gain. In fact, this might be the major health issue of the future, since so many children are doing their research on line and typing their reports using computer keyboards.

As a parent, in order to ensure that your children are a healthy weight, you have to be actively involved in their lives. Monitor not only what your children are watching, but also what they are eating. Encourage healthy snacks whenever possible, and discourage snacking while watching television. Requiring your children to eat at the dining room table rather than in front of the television can also be an important step. In the end, being involved in your children's weight reduction program is the key to ensuring that they lead healthy lives.

## **If You Want to Lose Weight, Stay at Home**

Some interesting new research indicates that you are better off staying home than eating in a restaurant, if you are trying to lose weight. Given the fact that as many as two-thirds of Americans are overweight, and many people spend at least part of their day in restaurants, the findings are particularly troubling.

According to Dr. Caroline Cederquist, a physician specializing in weight management, in 1978, less than 20 percent of the calories Americans consumed were eaten outside the home. As late as 2003, the number had climbed to 50 percent. Cederquist says that restaurant food tends to be higher in calories because it relies so much on salt, sugar, and oil. Also, restaurant portions tend to be larger, making it difficult to make healthy choices. It has been estimated that restaurant servings tend to be three to four times greater than typical serving sizes. Another problem is that restaurants often serve bread or rolls with a meal, which can cause dieters to pack on the pounds.

Restaurant appetizers tend to be extremely high in calories. For instance, a basket of fried onions can pack a whopping 2,000 calories. Now, while you might not devour the entire basket yourself, chances are you will have a good share of it if it is passed around the table.

A number of restaurants now offer free refills of soda. Soda glasses also tend to be large, meaning that you are receiving greater servings of this sugary beverage. Just the soda alone can put you far over your daily recommended allowance of calories for weight loss.

Another problem is that we have been conditioned to clean our plates. With plate sizes growing in restaurants, this becomes a critical weight issue. You may feel morally obligated to eat everything that's placed in front of you—even if your weight and health will suffer as a result.

Once people become accustomed to large portions when eating out, they tend to increase their portion sizes at home as well. As a result, dieters can be sabotaged both in restaurants and at home. If you eat out more than once a week, toning down your portion sizes can be particular difficult.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to any dieter is the restaurant buffet. There are so many different foods being offered, it is difficult to limit yourself. Also, since you can go back to the buffet as many times as you want, you may be tempted to overindulge. As a result, dieticians recommend either avoiding the restaurant buffet altogether, or limiting your second portions to fruits and vegetables.

Yet another problem is the type of entrees served in restaurants. They tend to be rich in fat and calories. Fettucini Alfredo, prime rib, and fried chicken can all cause you to gain weight. A number of restaurants are now designating low-fat entrees on their menus, a trend which bodes well for the future. However, this experiment is still limited to a small portion of restaurants—it has not yet become a widespread trend.

Of course, eating out does not necessarily mean eating at restaurants. It can also mean eating in the car, where you may be prone to non-nutritious snacking, or eating at parties held at the homes of your friends and relatives. At parties, diet-saboteurs such as potato chips and cookies tend to be plentiful; at times, you may find such goodies hard to resist. Eating at home shortly before a party may be the best way to avoid gaining unwanted pounds.

What can you do if you are forced to eat out several times a week? Make sure that you stick to your diet plan. Don't be tempted to indulge in the wrong kinds of foods "just this once." Select entrees that are accompanied by vegetables, and resist the urge to order dessert. Consider eating only half of your entrée and boxing up the rest for your next meal. And don't starve yourself prior to eating out. Such a tactic will cause you to overeat once you get to the restaurant. Following sensible eating patterns, both at restaurants and at home, will help you to achieve your ideal weight.

### **Water: The Hidden Diet Ingredient**

Water is vital for our survival. But it can also be critical in helping you lose weight. When beginning a weight loss program, many people fail to incorporate enough water into their diet, causing them to lose the benefits that water can provide. As a result, they don't lose as much weight as they should.

It has been said that water is a natural way to counteract hunger pains. When you drink water, you tend to "feel full" quite quickly. It also flushes out your system, allowing your body to rid itself of harmful toxins. Water can also boost your energy level and improve your metabolism, allowing you to consume calories more quickly.

Research indicates that hunger and thirst may be inextricably linked. That means that at times, you may think that you're hungry, while actually you're thirsty. Drinking water during those periods can help you to feel satiated without expanding your waistline. As a result, by consuming water, you may feel less of a need to eat.

You might be wondering, however, how much water is enough. Generally speaking, you should be drinking eight ounce glasses of water eight times a day. However, if you are heavier, you might actually require more water than that. It has been proven that obese people need more water than thin people. You should probably check with your health care provider to determine how much water is right for you. You should also be sure to drink water when you are exercising in order to replace fluids that you lose through perspiration.

Of course, you may not enjoy the taste of water, particularly tap water. As a result, you might consider drinking water flavored with lemon, eating soup, or consuming fruits high in water content. Water can combat high blood pressure and can decrease your cholesterol levels. It can also be a remedy against water retention, kidney trouble, skin problems, and migraines. It may even help to prevent cancer.

Water can also enhance your muscle tone, helping you to achieve a more clearly defined physique. Therefore, it is particularly important that you drink a great deal of water if you enter into a strength training program. You cannot expect your muscles to work properly if you do not hydrate them with water.

The temperature of your water can also make a significant difference. It is believed that water that is cold is digested faster than water that is of a higher temperature. In fact, water that is relatively cold in temperature can actually serve as a calorie-burner.

You may be surprised to learn that your body is comprised of nearly 70 percent water. Therefore, water is crucial for the proper functioning of your metabolism. Water can also help to regulate your body temperature, enabling your body to work more effectively.

Certain symptoms will emerge if you're not consuming enough water. For instance, you may find it difficult to concentrate. You may also have a constant feeling of being tired. You may be constipated or experience dry skin. At times, you may also feel constipated and you may notice that you're not passing as much urine as you should.

Of course, if you are not getting enough water in your diet, the remedy is simple—just turn on the tap and let it flow. However, realistically, it can be difficult to get into the water habit. Therefore, you might have to trick your body into drinking water. How do you do this? To begin with, you should consider drinking a glass of water as soon as you get up in the morning. This will ensure that you are getting your day off to a healthy start. Have a drink in mid-morning and another right before lunch. If you drink a cup with lunch, you will have already had half of your daily water requirements. Have a drink in the mid-afternoon, another at dinner, one after dinner, and one right before bed. In this way, you will likely be getting all the water your body needs. Try this experiment for a few weeks, and you may be amazed at the difference you see in your health and appearance.

## **When Fast Weight Loss Becomes Unhealthy**

You've made the decision to lose weight as quickly as possible. You have your diet in place and you expect to follow it religiously. At this point, you may be wondering how much weight you can lose in a given week and whether fast weight loss can be dangerous for your body.

There are a number of things that can affect your weight loss. For instance, family history, or genetics, can play a significant role. Also, your weight loss may depend upon how much exercise you're engaging in, as well as how much stress you are under. Your metabolism, or how quickly you burn calories, can also have a major effect.

Theoretically, you could lose as much as 20 pounds a week. However, much of that weight could be water weight. That means that, once you go off your diet, you are likely to gain much of that weight back. Also, unless you engage in strength training, you will

be losing muscle as well as fat, since about ¼ of the body's weight consists of muscle. It is interesting to note that, at most, you can probably lose four pounds of fat in a given week.

Nature has a way of protecting the body against excessive weight loss. If, for instance, your calorie count suddenly drops, your body will compensate for the fact by reducing your metabolic rate. As a result, you'll need fewer calories to maintain your weight. This explains why some people lose weight up to a point and then cannot lose any additional weight, no matter how hard they try.

If you lose weight quickly, there's a good chance that your health will be jeopardized. For instance, fast weight loss has been linked to the appearance of gall stones. Also, you may experience loose skin as your weight goes into free fall. Perhaps most distressing of all, if you experience rapid weight loss, there's a good chance that you will gain the weight back again. This is because it is very difficult to maintain a healthy diet regimen. You may find yourself falling back into your bad eating habits after a period of deprivation.

Fast weight loss also places you at greater risk for an eating disorder. You may be tempted to starve yourself, leading to anorexia. Or, because your food cravings are so great, you may want to binge and purge, leading to a case of bulimia. This is why it is so critically important to lose weight under a physician's care. Otherwise, you could be doing more harm to your body than good.

Although the body has the capability of shedding a great deal of weight over a period of time, most medical experts agree that one should not expect to lose more than one or two pounds a week in order to remain healthy. This can be disappointing to a dieter, especially one that needs to lose about 50 pounds. However, doctors believe that the go-slow approach is best for long-term weight loss. Otherwise, you could end up with a number of health problems you weren't anticipating.

There are a number of approaches you can use to lose weight. For instance, you might follow the Atkins plan, the Zone, or the diabetic diet. You might try Sugar Busters or the Carb Addict's prescription for losing weight. However, it is vitally important that you accompany your diet plan with an effective exercise routine. One of the best exercises you can do, in fact, is the easiest—walking. It has been said that you can lose as many as two pounds a week, just by walking alone.

As has been demonstrated here, rapid weight loss should be approached with caution. It is far better to lose a few pounds each week and maintain that weight loss over the long term. In essence, all good things take time, and that is particularly true when it comes to weight loss. Perhaps the best advice is to be patient. Follow a reasonable diet, get plenty of exercise, and drink a good amount of water. That way, you should be able to slowly lose weight—without jeopardizing your health in the process.

## Reward Your Way to Weight Loss

From an early age, we are conditioned to reward ourselves with food. It might have begun in kindergarten, when we were treated to cupcakes at the annual Halloween party. It may have continued through junior high and high school, when we reached for the cookies after a hard day at school. In adulthood, we may buy a high-calorie frappuccino to celebrate a success on the job.

But the problem is, food was not designed to be a reward. It exists simply to give us energy. When we look at food as a reward, there is a great temptation to overeat. We believe that we deserve it, that we've earned this opportunity to indulge. We feel gratified when we eat food that might otherwise be forbidden.

Our food-as-reward culture has had calamitous consequences. An increasing number of us are overweight, and getting fatter by the year. We suffer from a myriad of health problems as a result of our obesity. We may feel lethargic and unmotivated—too stuffed to engage in exercise. We have become a nation of couch potatoes.

Yet, we don't have to continue living this way. We can simply stop rewarding ourselves with food. However, it may not be that simple. We will have to change our mindset—to develop alternative systems of rewards. While this may seem difficult at first, it can be accomplished in time.

Here are some ideas for rewards that do not involve food:

- Give yourself a day at the beach. This can clear your mind and can be wonderfully invigorating.
- Schedule some play time. Your play might involve tennis, video games, or blowing bubbles—whatever activity that will get your mind away from the daily routine.
- Go shopping at a dollar store. You won't spend much, but you could pick up some tremendous bargains.
- Share some quality time with your dog or cat. Grab some pet toys and have some fun.
- Go to the cosmetics counter of your local department store and indulge in a makeover.
- Spend a day at a spa. It can be wonderfully relaxing to be pampered with massage and aromatherapy.
- Volunteer an hour or two at your local elementary school. Being with children, even for a short time, can be a rewarding experience.
- Take your children to the playground, a roller rink, or a swim club. The activity can leave you feeling refreshed and energized.
- Buy a new CD from one of your favorite musical artists. Then make sure you spend an hour or two listening to it.
- If you play a musical instrument, sit down and play a few tunes. Music can be a great mood-elevator.

- If you don't like the idea of developing an alternative reward system, consider simply varying your routine. If you've become accustomed to rewarding yourself with a high-calorie cappuccino in the morning, spend some time in quiet prayer or reflection instead. If you feel as if you'll be tempted to raid a candy store on your way home from work, take an alternate route instead. In general, keeping busy can prevent you from indulging in food rewards. For instance, you might be so busy reading or knitting that you simply don't have time to reach for a snack.
- Making a conscious decision to no longer use food as a reward is certainly counter-cultural. We have been conditioned to believe that there should be a plate of brownies at the end of the rainbow...that heaven is just one hot fudge sundae after another. While food itself isn't bad, our expectations about food can be. The first step to ending a food addiction may be to recognize that food can no longer serve as our reward.
- While it can be rough getting out of the food-as-reward habit, it is well worth the effort. If we no longer view food as the prize, we will organize our day differently. We'll devote our mealtimes to food, and the rest of our day to something else. We will eat only those foods designed to help us stay healthy—and we'll be in better shape as a result.

## **The Federal Government's Take on Weight Loss**

You may be surprised what the federal government has to say about weight loss. The National Institutes of Health has some interesting ideas about what it takes to trim the fat. You may find that a number of these ideas conflict with what you've been hearing in the popular press.

For instance, you may have read that consuming red meat makes it more difficult for you to shed pounds. Actually, lean meat can be a critical component of a diet. While red meat, chicken, and pork may have cholesterol and saturated fat, they also have important minerals such as iron and zinc. However, when eating meat, you should try to make sure that it is low in fat. You can choose from sirloin tip, round steak, and flank steak. You should also be aware of proper portion sizes—the average portion should be the size of a billfold folded over.

You may have heard that dairy products are fattening. However, low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese have all the nutrients of whole milk products, with fewer calories and less fat. Dairy products are particularly beneficial for their calcium, protein, and vitamin D content. According to federal guidelines, children, teenagers, and senior citizens should have three servings of milk products each day, while adults age 19 to 49 should have two helpings daily. A serving would consist of a single cup of milk or yogurt, or 1 ½ ounces of cheese. If you have trouble digesting milk products, consider lactose-free items. You may also be able to get your calcium from juice or salmon, and your vitamin D from juice or cereal.

The federal government maintains that becoming a vegetarian will not automatically make you lose weight. However, studies have indicated that vegetarians do ingest fewer calories than meat-eaters and tend to have lower body mass indexes. However, even as a vegetarian, you have to watch your intake of high-calorie food. Also, as a vegetarian you will have to find ways to ensure that you get plenty of iron, protein, calcium, and vitamin D, which might otherwise be missing from your diet. As a result, it is important that you select vegetarian entrees that are not only low-fat, but high in nutrition. For instance, spinach will give you iron, broccoli can provide calcium, milk offers vitamin D, eggs provide vitamin B12, whole grains offer zinc, and eggs give you protein.

You might have been told that you should not eat nuts if you want to shed pounds. In actuality, a small amount of nuts can be an ingredient of your weight loss plan. While nuts are, generally speaking, high in fat, the fat is considered a healthy kind that does not harm the arteries. Nuts can provide you with not only protein, but fiber and magnesium as well. But it is important that you eat nuts in moderation. This means consuming only about a third of a cup or less per day.

Federal health officials are firm on the idea that fasting is not a good way to lose weight. It is far better to eat regular meals, although you might opt for smaller meals than you might ordinarily choose eaten more frequently. Meals help to kick-start your metabolism, enabling it to thrive throughout the day.

If you are skeptical about a particular weight loss claim, you can check the Federal Trade Commission's website at [www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/features/wgtloss.htm](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/features/wgtloss.htm) for the information you need. Also, you might benefit from discussing your concerns with a registered dietician. In order to locate one in your geographical area, log onto the American Dietetic Association website at [www.eatright.org/Public/PublicDieticianDisclaimerAdvanced.htm](http://www.eatright.org/Public/PublicDieticianDisclaimerAdvanced.htm).

Does the federal government have all the answers when it comes to weight loss? Perhaps not. But it is clear that the feds have a great deal of research to back up their claims. Therefore, you should carefully consider the nutritional information that comes from federal sources. The federal government is interested in having a healthy populace; it has nothing to gain by promoting specific weight loss programs. Therefore, you can be sure that the information that you are getting from federal health authorities is information you can trust. And it could make a great deal of difference, as far as your personal weight is concerned.

## **Surgery: A Weight Loss Plan for the Toughest Cases**

Recently, a number of high-profile celebrities, from TV weatherman Al Roker to American Idol's Randy Jackson, have made headlines as a result of undergoing weight loss surgery. Supporters of such surgery say that it offers hope for people who seem unable to lose weight any other way. They maintain that it is difficult to lose 50 or more pounds without surgical intervention. Critics, however, maintain that surgery—especially stomach surgery—is risky business and should be approached with the utmost

caution. They worry that surgery is a quick fix which does not help to resolve an individual's problem dealing with food.

You might wonder under what conditions surgery would be recommended. Generally speaking, surgery is only an option for those who have suffered from obesity for a protracted period of time (meaning years), have a body mass index or BMI of more than 40, and whose lives could be cut short because of their excessive weight gain. Also, stomach stapling surgery is usually limited to those who have already reached adulthood.

Conversely, you would not be a candidate for stomach reduction surgery if you have been severely overweight for a short period of time; if you suffer from drug or alcohol addiction; or you have been diagnosed with mental illness. In other words, you need to be fully cognizant and have a detailed understanding of the reasons for your obesity.

You should know that stomach reduction surgery is a proven weight-reducer. You could lose nearly all of your extra weight by undergoing the procedure. Thus, surgery may negate the need for a diet plan, although there is the slim possibility that you could end up putting on additional pounds after your operation.

There are a myriad of reasons why you might consider stomach stapling surgery. For instance, if you are suffering from adult onset diabetes or heart trouble, you might want to undergo the operation. If you are so obese that you can barely walk, surgery might be for you. If your weight has gotten to the point where you literally find it difficult to get out of bed, an operation might be appropriate.

Of course, stomach stapling surgery is not without its risks. In less than two percent of the cases, death may occur. Also, there is the possibility that after surgery you may experience vomiting if you attempt to eat too much. And then there's the psychological fallout. If you've been a heavy person all your life, you may have trouble adjusting to your new thin status. You may even find that your relationships with relatives and friends change after you have undergone surgery. As a result of this, some physicians recommend that candidates for stomach stapling surgery meet with a psychotherapist who can help them develop coping mechanisms before and after the surgery.

Obviously, undergoing surgery is a serious step—one that should not be undertaken lightly. As a result, you might want to ask yourself some questions before going under the knife: Why do I want to undergo surgery? What if I discover there are unexpected side-effects from surgery? Will I be able to deal with them? What are my options if I do not undergo surgery? Will my family and friends support my decision to undergo an operation? Am I considering surgery out of vanity, or because of a serious health threat? Will years be added to my life after I undergo surgery?

Of course, you cannot make the decision for stomach surgery on your own. You will need to consult your family physician to determine if an operation is right for you. If your doctor gives the O.K., you will then have to meet with the surgeon. Make sure to check the surgeon's credentials and consider having a second opinion. The more

preparation you do before your operation, the better off you will be. Obviously, stomach stapling surgery is not for everyone. It carries with it physical and emotional risks. However, the prognosis for those who undergo such surgery is good. And you could end up being in much better health in the long run, if you are able to successfully lose your excess weight.

## **The Diet Pill: A Quick Fix?**

Modern medicine has given us a number of miracles in a bottle. We have pills for arthritis, pills for heartburn, pills for heart trouble. We have pills that will help us wake up in the morning, pills that will help us digest our afternoon meal, and pills that will enable us to sleep at night. We live in a pill-popping society.

Because of the number of medications available, we often turn to pills to cure what ails us—no matter what our trouble might be. Whether it's physical or emotional, we may believe that medication will take care of the problem. As a result, it's not surprising that a number of us also turn to diet pills in an effort to control our weight.

There are a number of advantages to using diet pills when trying to fight fat. To begin with, diet pills are quick-acting—we may see results after only a little bit of time has elapsed. As a result, we may gain confidence and lose even more weight as a result of our success with diet pills. Other people—friends, relatives, co-workers—may notice our weight loss and may compliment us as a result. Consequently, we may be motivated to work even harder at our weight loss.

Diet pills are also convenient. We can keep them in our medicine cabinet or kitchen cupboard. We can take a pill in the morning and not have to worry about our weight for the rest of the day. We don't have to do a great deal of research, as is required when we are trying to determine which diet to try. In addition, taking a diet pill is hardly as strenuous as running five miles or swimming ten laps.

Moreover, diet pills can help us to shift some of the responsibility for losing weight to another entity. No longer is it simply up to us to control our weight. We look to the pill to resolve our weight problem, once and for all. This can help to lower our anxiety, reducing our stress level.

But there are also serious disadvantages to using diet pills. For instance, there is the possibility that we will become addicted to the medication. This can take a toll on not only our physical health, but our emotional health as well. We may become too dependent on the pills, expecting them to solve our weight problems.

Diet pills also teach us nothing about good nutrition. You do not have to learn about proper diet if you are depending on a pill to take your excess weight away. As a result, an individual may never discover the importance of healthy eating, and his or her overall health could suffer as a result.

In addition, there is no such thing as a quick fix when it comes to weight loss. While you might lose weight for a time after taking diet pills, you could quickly regain the weight, once you go off the pills. As a result, diet pills fail to provide a life-long approach to healthy weight maintenance.

Given the pros and cons of diet pills, you might be wondering whether they would be right for you. Check with your family physician. He or she is in the best position to assess your overall health and determine whether diet pills would be appropriate in your particular case. Secondly, consider consulting with a nutritionist. He or she can help advise you about whether to take diet pills.

Diet pills are a huge industry within the U.S. So, there is a great deal of marketing, urging you to purchase these so-called wonder drugs. But, before you buy, you have to seriously consider whether these pills could jeopardize your health. While it may be important for you to lose weight, it is even more important for you to shield your body from harm.

Weight loss is not miraculous. It takes a great deal of dedication and perseverance. Therefore, it is unlikely that you will find the secret to weight loss in a bottle. By changing your diet and exercising, you might notice only incremental changes in your weight. However, over the long term, you might be better able to maintain healthy weight loss by sticking with the tried-and-true formula of diet and exercise.

## **Beware of Diet Fads When Trying to Shed Pounds**

It might be actresses such as Suzanne Sommers and Jane Fonda, or models such as Christie Brinkley or Kathy Ireland. It seems that a number of celebrities today offer their own weight loss programs. The programs are appealing because we see these various svelte celebrities and we want to have bodies just like them. The celebrities are also highly likable, so we have a predisposition to be accepting of their products.

However, did you ever stop to think whether these celebrities have any nutritional training? Do they have medical training? Is the information that they offer nutritionally sound? Or is it just a good sales pitch?

Nutrition experts Annette B. Natow and Jo-Ann Heslin, authors of the book *Get Skinny the Smart Way*, say that consumers should be leery of celebrity-inspired diet books. They point out that such books are often based upon nutritional fiction and that, while the diets outlined in these books may result in short-term weight loss, they can be far from healthy in the long run. Therefore, you might consider passing up the celebrity diet books and opting for those written by nutritional experts instead.

But celebrities aren't the only ones preaching fad diets. For instance, there's the so-called grapefruit diet which recommends consuming a grapefruit prior to each meal. Another fad is the cabbage soup diet, which requires you to consume all the cabbage soup

you can handle. Other fads call for eating all the eggs you can...consuming only raw foods...or fasting every other day. Such diets are not only based on nutritional misinformation—they can also be dangerous.

For instance, let's take a closer look at the cabbage soup diet. No major health organization has endorsed it. Moreover, the American Heart Association disapproves of it, noting that it can actually harm you. Promoters of this diet say that you can lose as much as 15 pounds a week by following it—what they don't say is that most of that weight is water weight. Once you begin eating normally again, you will see your weight rise once more. Some of the side-effects of the cabbage soup diet include a feeling of weakness, stomach pains, and diarrhea.

Yet another questionable diet approach is what's known as food combining. Such a diet assumes that you are overweight because you are not eating the right combination of food. The requirements of such a diet can seem quite arbitrary. For instance, you might be told that you can eat a banana only in the morning. This is rubbish, since your stomach can deal with a variety of different foods at one time. The idea behind such a diet is to eat food with fewer calories, but there are other methods you can use to accomplish the same goals.

Some companies even claim that you can shed pounds while you dream. They say that, if you use their product right before bedtime, you will lose weight. In actuality, no company can make such a claim with any degree of credibility. It is impossible to burn a large number of calories while snoozing. In other cases, you may be tempted to try to lose weight by consuming special milkshakes or candy bars. In essence, these products are just milk and candy with certain vitamins and minerals added. However, one rarely feels satisfied after consuming these products. As a result, you may find yourself actually consuming additional calories during the rest of the day. While you might be able to theoretically lose weight in the short-term, you'll find it difficult to maintain the weight loss over the long haul.

The fact of the matter is that there is a great deal of money that can be made through the sale and marketing of diet products. As long as America has a large contingent of overweight people, companies will try to make a profit off of overeating. It is up to you to be savvy enough to recognize a diet fad when you see it and opt for a different approach to losing weight. You'll find that there are really no short-cuts to weight loss. Any successful diet program takes time, patience, and determination, along with a willingness to change your eating patterns.

## **Pectin: A Key to Long-Term Weight Loss?**

You may never have heard of pectin, but you may have been eating it for a long time without knowing it. Pectin is found in a variety of fruits, such as apples, peaches, and strawberries, along with vegetables including sweet potatoes, beans, and raw carrots. Pectin is defined as a carbohydrate that lacks calories. It is also a reliable source of fiber,

which is a prime ingredient of a healthy diet. Pectin is not absorbed by the body, but manages to cut cholesterol and blood sugar levels. It may even prevent colon cancer.

One of the interesting things about pectin is that it causes the stomach to empty more slowly. As a result, after you consume pectin, you feel satisfied for a lengthy period of time. This means that you will ultimately eat less, leading to weight loss. Research has shown that a small dose of pectin will do the trick—as little as a single teaspoon can enable you to feel satisfied.

You'll find pectin at your local grocery store. There's the powder, which may be known as Sure-Jel, and the liquid, known as Certo. Derived from apples and grapefruit, pectin is ordinarily found among the baking supplies in the supermarket. You can also find pectin in health food stores.

Supporters of the pectin approach to weight loss recommend adding it to orange juice, water, or soft drinks. The pectin should have no effect on the taste of your beverage. Given the fact that pectin is fiber, you should increase your intake of it gradually. Begin with a teaspoon a day and then work your way up to three teaspoons daily. In addition to adding it to beverages, you might consider putting pectin in applesauce, baked potatoes, or broth.

Pectin is just one kind of fiber. In general, fiber is a key element to any successful weight loss program. Physicians believe you should consume anywhere from 25 to 35 grams of fiber daily, although most Americans eat 15 grams or less. Fiber also has a number of positive health effects. It has been linked to reducing cholesterol, managing diabetes, and limiting heart damage. One Swiss study determined that consuming a high-fiber meal reduced hunger more than eating a meal low in fiber. You can find a number of sources for fiber. These include carrots, peas, spinach, and cauliflower. In addition, there are a number of fiber-enriched breakfast cereals and breads. For the most part, food that is high in fiber is low-fat.

There are some simple ways that you can increase your intake of fiber. For instance, you can add garbanzo beans to your salad or soup, or serve a tablespoon of bran with your cereal. Consuming the skin of fruits and vegetables will also enhance your fiber intake. Since the actual fiber content of individual foods tends to be low, it is best if you increase the number of servings of fiber-filled food that you eat each day.

At times, you might consider eating dinners that don't contain meat. This is because meat has no fiber, so it doesn't give you the health benefits that fiber-rich food does. Instead, concentrate on eating grains, fruits, and vegetables. In this way, you can make sure that your meal has a hearty concentration of fiber.

It should be said that it can become difficult to become accustomed to a diet rich in fiber. It is indeed counter-cultural, since many families grew up consuming a great deal of meat. However, if you're serious about weight loss, you'll give fiber-rich meals a try.

Such foods, combined with other sensible eating, can help you lose the weight and ensure that it stays off.

Don't think that you can graduate to a high-fiber diet overnight. It may require a great deal of trial-and-error before you hit upon the right amount of fiber. However, in the end, you may be amazed at the positive role that fiber plays in your diet. And you may be inspired to encourage others to add more fiber to their own diets as well. It has even been said that a high fiber diet can help you to better manage the amount of food that you consume. So load up on fiber—and watch your waistline shrink as a result.

## **Exercise: A Three-Pronged Approach to Weight Loss**

You have probably heard that it is impossible to sustain significant weight loss without exercise. Simply cutting calories is usually not enough to get your weight under control. You must couple dieting with a rigorous physical activity program. In general, the best exercise program follows a three-step approach: aerobic exercise, weight training, and stretching.

Aerobic exercise is important for revving up your heart rate and breathing for long time periods. There are a range of aerobic activities you can engage in, including swimming, biking, walking, dancing, kick boxing, and spinning. Health experts recommend that you do aerobic exercise at least 20 minutes, three days a week. Of course, if you can exercise more than that, you will be improving your metabolism even more. If you don't have time to exercise for 20 minutes at a time, consider exercising in ten minute spurts. (Your body won't know the difference.) You should be exercising at a fast pace—but not so fast that you cannot talk while exerting. If you begin feeling dizzy, stop immediately.

Weight training is another important component of your weekly exercise program. Through strength training, you will enhance muscle, increase your strength, and promote bone growth. The interesting thing about weight training is that, once you start it, you'll be burning calories—even if you're sleeping or at rest. You can achieve strength training in a number of ways. For instance, you might use Nautilus machines, free weights, or resistance bands. Push-ups, sit-ups, and leg lifts are another kind of resistance training. You should be engaging in weight training at least twice a week, doing eight to ten repetitions of each individual exercise. You may even want to employ a personal trainer to help you with your weight training program. The trainer should be certified by the American Council on Exercise or the Aerobics and Fitness Association of America.

Flexibility helps to loosen your muscles so that you have easy motion in your joints. This type of exercise reduces the likelihood that you will be injured and helps to combat the effects of aging. You should do your stretching exercises at least two or three times a week and you should hold each stretch for a minimum of 20 seconds.

There are certain myths that are associated with exercise and weight loss. For instance, it is possible to age without gaining weight. By engaging in exercise, you can guard against the inactivity which can cause you to pack on the pounds. Also, you don't have to experience pain in order to exercise properly—another myth that has been circulating through the years. You might think you're too old for weight training. Think again! Weight training is appropriate for all adults, provided that you proceed with caution and gradually increase your training program. Also, just because you've stopped exercising, it doesn't necessarily mean you've lost all the benefits. The pleasant side-effects of exercise tend to linger. This means that you can stop exercising for a month and not lose too much ground.

You might also be surprised to learn that you can actually laugh your way to weight loss. Studies have shown that laughing is equivalent to light aerobic activity. A good laugh exercises your muscles, enhances your breathing rate, and causes the oxygen in your blood to rise.

Another helpful weight loss activity is fidgeting. Wiggling your foot, tapping your fingers on a desk, or chewing gum can actually cause you to burn calories. While you might not be able to lose all your excess pounds through fidgeting, just a little physical activity can go a long way to helping you achieve your weight loss goals.

Some people believe that, if only they diet, they'll lose all the weight they need to. However, studies have consistently shown that exercise is the key to maintaining weight loss. Still, it is important that you follow a rational approach to exercise. This means combining aerobic activity, strength training, and stretching and performing these activities consistently through the week. In this way, you should be able to shed pounds and keep them off in the long run. And you may feel as if you have more energy in the process!

## **Getting in Step with Weight Loss**

As children, one of the first exercises we learned how to do was walking. While it may seem like an elementary form of exercise, walking can do wonders for the heart, the circulatory system, and our legs. Walking can also be instrumental in helping individuals to lose weight.

Medical experts say the important thing to keep in mind when starting a walking program is distance rather than time. In essence, it doesn't matter how long it takes you to complete a mile—the important thing is to do it. If you hope to burn off two pounds a week, you will need to walk enough to burn about 3500 calories. If you weigh 160 pounds and you are walking at a rate of two miles per hour, you can burn as many as 105 calories.

A helpful technique when beginning a walking program is to build up your leg muscles so that you are able to burn additional calories. If you can, try to race-walk.

Your goal should be to finish a mile in 13 minutes. Another technique you can use is by adding weights to your walking routine. For instance, you can pack eight pound weights into a backpack and wear it as you walk.

Ultimately, you might want to work up to the point where you are walking at least six hours a week. In addition to helping you to shed pounds, this will enable you to combat such diseases as diabetes and cancer. You should feel healthier—and perhaps happier—as a result of your walking.

At this point, you might be wondering whether to do your walking outdoors or on a treadmill at a gym. The choice is really up to you. It depends largely on what makes you more comfortable. Some people enjoy being out of doors—they like looking at the trees and the flowers as they move along. Others find that the traffic and animals found outdoors can be too distracting. Also, many people find it difficult to walk in the rain or snow. Some individuals like the discipline offered by a treadmill, while others find it boring and confining. One advantage to a treadmill is that it allows you to keep track of the number of miles you logged, as well as your speed. That can be valuable information when you're attempting to chart your progress.

Of course, it's best if you couple walking with a sound diet plan. You should attempt to consume at least five servings a day of fruits and vegetables. Limit your intake of high-fat foods and sweets. Sensible eating will also enable you to maintain your weight over the long term.

When you set out to walk, make sure that you begin with some stretching exercises. These can help prepare your muscles for your workout. In addition, begin your walk with a five or ten-minute warm up period. The rest of your walk should be brisk—you should be walking at a pace similar to what you would use if you were late getting to work. You should continue this pace for approximately 30 minutes, then begin a cool-down period where you walk at a more moderate pace. Following this regimen should ensure that you get the most out of your walking.

One of the best aspects of walking is that it is an activity that nearly any able-bodied person can do. It does not require special equipment or special training. It is important, however, that you remain committed to walking. Doing it for just one or two days a week is probably not enough to make an appreciable difference in your weight. Rather, you should aim to do a brisk walk at least six days a week. Once you get into the habit of walking, you should find it relatively easy to continue. It's something that can quickly become part of your morning routine. In fact, some experts recommend that you do your walking in the morning to ensure that your metabolism is elevated throughout your day. Walking late at night will not have the same effect; it will do little to raise your daily metabolism.

## The Secrets to Weight Loss After Pregnancy

Sarah is a pregnant mother of three who continues to breast-feed her 18-month-old. After each of her pregnancies, she has had difficulty losing weight. With all of her responsibilities, weight loss isn't a priority. Still, she wishes that, once this pregnancy is over, she will be able to return to her pre-marriage weight.

The average woman gains more than 25 pounds during her pregnancy. The procedure of childbirth may result in a weight loss of up to 14 pounds, which means that new moms still have considerable weight to lose once they leave the hospital. However, some women simply assume that this "baby fat" will never go away. Yet, it is entirely possible to lose weight during the post-partum period.

A number of medical experts recommend easing into a weight loss program after the birth of your baby. This means that you will not start dieting until about three months following birth. You should combine a low-fat diet with moderate exercise in order to achieve weight loss.

Don't expect instant results. It will take you a good nine months to get back to your weight prior to pregnancy. A go-slow approach is best because you need to give your body time to recover after childbirth. Certainly, you might be able to lose weight faster, but you might be sacrificing valuable nutrients as a result.

Interestingly enough, breastfeeding actually enhances weight loss. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has found that breastfeeding leads to the release of hormones which enable your uterus to return to its normal size. However, breastfeeding alone won't bring down your weight. You need to combine it with a sensible diet and a moderate exercise program. Keep in mind that you need to have at least 1800 calories a day while breastfeeding in order to keep yourself and your baby healthy. Still, stay clear of junk food during this period. You should rely on food with high nutritional value to maintain the proper level of calories each day.

There are many good reasons to exercise during the post-partum period. In addition to helping to accelerate weight reduction, exercise can help alleviate post-partum depression, improve your mood, and boost your confidence. Exercise can also "clear your head" so that you're better able to meet the demands of motherhood. You might consider joining a "Mommy and Me" exercise class so that your baby can exercise right along with you. Another helpful hint is to enlist the help of a friend or relative to act as your exercise buddy so that you'll have some emotional support while exercising. An added bonus of exercise is that it should boost your energy level, which is quite important when battling the fatigue which comes from caring for a newborn.

Your diet should generally be low-fat but not fat-free; vitamin rich; and high-fiber. Under no circumstances should you go on a fad diet. Such a diet could be quite harmful to your health and could actually slow your recovery from childbirth. It's a good idea to

set weight-loss goals, but don't go overboard. Recognize that there's a limit to the amount of weight you can lose during a given period of time.

You may see a number of actress-moms gracing the covers of magazines shortly after the birth of their children. They appear svelte and elegant, totally devoid of baby fat. In the accompanying article, they may even talk about exercising right after childbirth. Such articles send new mothers a dangerous message: that you must do all you can to become thin as quickly as possible after your baby is born. Such a philosophy is not only ridiculous, it's also unhealthy. As a result, you'll need to "tune out" such messages from the media and stay the course with your own gradual weight loss plan.

The time right after the birth of a child can be quite challenging, taxing both your physical and emotional strength. While it is certainly a good idea to eat healthy, you'll need to pace yourself as far as weight loss is concerned. Over time, you should be able to lose the weight you gained during your pregnancy. In fact, you might find that you're actually healthier after your baby is born.

## **Childhood Obesity—The Modern Health Dilemma**

You see it on the playgrounds, at roller rinks, at swimming pools, and in classrooms. Obesity is a modern health dilemma for today's children, who are struggling with weight as never before. It is a difficult problem to combat, given the fact that you want to make sure that your children are receiving sufficient amounts of nutrients in their diets. While some children may outgrow obesity, others carry it with them into their adult lives. Obesity in children can result in feelings of fatigue, worthlessness, and hopelessness. It can also place them at greater risk for diabetes and heart disease.

Just how widespread is the problem? The National Institutes of Health has determined that, over the last thirty years, the number of young people with weight problems has increased two fold. Interestingly enough, the problem is affecting children of all ages as well as children from all ethnic groups.

Children who are overweight may not develop socially as fast as their peers. They can become loners, finding it difficult to make friends. They may think that their weight is beyond their control and they may not know what to do in order to attempt to prevent weight gain. In essence, obese children can become our lost generation.

The parents of these children may not realize how detrimental obesity is to their children's emotional health. They may consider the obesity just a passing phase and they may not understand the psychological devastation that obesity can cause. They may even dismiss the concerns of their children, hoping that the problem will simply go away.

The causes of childhood obesity can be complex. However, there do appear to be a few identifiable triggers. For instance, many families now eat on the run because of their many commitments. Parents may not think they have time to prepare nutritious meals for their children, so they rely on fast food and sugary snacks to fill in the gaps. As a result,

children end up eating a diet that's rich in fat and sugar but which offers little in the way of nutritional value. According to the American Obesity Association, one third of parents believe their children's dietary habits are worse than theirs were during their own childhoods.

Another key problem is inactivity. Children watch more than a full day's worth of television each week. That's in addition to the hours they devote to their computers. As a result, they're not playing outside as much as children of generations past. Also, many children may feel as if they cannot participate in sports because of their weight. Feeling defeated before they even start, they pass up opportunities to engage in physical activities.

It has been shown that children tend to be heavily influenced by advertising. Unfortunately, many commercials tout foods that can be best classified as unhealthy. Children crave what they see on TV and in movie theaters and they may not realize what these foods will do to their bodies.

Luckily, childhood obesity can be successfully conquered. Here are a few tips to help your child overcome a weight problem:

- Encourage your child to take part in sports or dance. If your son or daughter is self-conscious about being a part of a team, exercise with him or her. Take out a ball and shoot a few hoops or turn on the stereo and begin to dance. You may be surprised that, with just a little encouragement, your child will get up and start moving.
- Consider limiting TV time. Research clearly shows that TV time is unproductive time for children and teens. If your children spend less time watching TV, they may spend more time exercising.
- Ban junk food from your home. With a little push, children will become accustomed to eating healthy snacks such as fruit and vegetables.
- Check with your child's pediatrician to see if he or she can recommend some specific weight control strategies.

Childhood obesity is a problem, but it is not insurmountable. The greater the interest you show in your child's diet and exercise regimen, the more influence you will have over your child. In time, your child can learn the strategies necessary for a healthy life.

## Conclusion

Weight gain is a serious issue, no matter what your stage in life. It is a major health concern and can serve to shorten your life if it is not addressed. Certainly, there are a large number of diet plans on the market today. Each has its strengths and weaknesses, its assets and liabilities. Ultimately, it is best to consult with your doctor and a registered dietician in order to find the diet plan that is right for you.

However, long-term weight loss requires more than just a stellar diet plan. It also requires a commitment to a lifetime of healthy eating, a sensible exercise program, and an understanding of the dynamics of overeating. If you can master these elements, chances are you will be successful not only when it comes to losing weight, but maintaining weight loss as well.