

we know what matters

DIETARY APPROACHES TO WEIGHT LOSS

Changes in diet need to be maintained and research shows that overly restrictive diets and fad diets may have nutritional deficiencies, are unsustainable and often cause long-term weight gain. It is vital that any weight loss diet contains adequate nutrition for good health consistent with current dietary guidelines.

There are 3 main categories of weight loss diets:

reduced energy diets

low energy diets

very low energy diets

Reduced energy diets involve a reduction in energy intake of usually between 2000 and 4000 KJ per day. A sustainable weight loss of 0.5-1kg per week providing a significant weight loss over 1-2 years with the all important reduction in waist circumference is achievable. The most success in the long term with reduced energy diets is when fat intake is significantly reduced, which also allows for maintenance of nutritional requirements.

Low energy diets usually provide 4000 to 5000 KJ per day, often using meal replacements such as shakes, soups or bars and/or pre-packaged portion controlled meals. They have been shown to reduce weight by an average of 8% over 3-6 months. Over the longer term of 3.5 to 4 years the average maintenance of weight loss was shown to be 4% less than the starting weight.

Very low energy diets provide 1700 to 3300 KJ daily, using vitamin and mineral fortified liquid meals as generally the sole nutritional source. This is only recommended for the morbidly obese or when rapid weight loss is medically required. These diets obviously provide greater short-term weight loss but research shows that over a period of 12 months, weight regain is similar to the low energy diets.

Neither low energy nor very low energy diets should be considered for continuous long-term treatment unless under the close supervision of a medical professional.

OTHER DIETARY FACTORS

Reducing dietary fat or dietary carbohydrate without an increase in total energy input does not reduce weight. Low carbohydrate diets do produce a quicker weight loss due to loss of the muscles' carbohydrate stores (not body fat) along with associated stored water. This water and glycogen is quickly replaced in the muscles once carbohydrate is reintroduced. Low carbohydrate diets have been shown to be ineffective long-term and "thankfully are now totally and utterly debunked" according to Dr Tim Crowe, nutrition lecturer from Deakin University.

Although in theory low GI diets could benefit weight control by promoting feelings of fullness and promoting usage of fat; the medical research to date shows no difference in weight loss when comparing high GI with low GI diets.

Energy density of food does have an impact on the amount of kilojoules we consume, as we prefer to eat a constant weight of food each day. Another important reason to consume more fibre, fruit and vegetables which all have lower energy densities than high fat and/or high sugar foods.

MEDICATIONS AND SURGICAL PROCEDURES

We do have scientific evidence that medications available from your pharmacist or doctor are effective; however a review of a large number of over the counter supplements marketed for weight loss showed that none of the supplements were effective and/or safe. Surgical procedures, of which lap banding is the most common in Australia, has proven to be effective in maintaining weight loss, as well as reducing mortality from causes positively associated with obesity.

we know what matters

SUCCESSFUL WEIGHT LOSS

Successful loss of weight is weight that is kept off long-term with lifelong changes to diet and lifestyle. Successful weight loss is associated with:

- ***low fat intake as part of a low energy intake***
- ***eating a nutritious breakfast ever day***
- ***exercising for approximately 1 hour per day or more***
- ***checking weight regularly***
- ***watching less than 10 hours of television per week***

Long-term support with an accredited practising dietitian, doctor, other health professional or support group is also positively associated with prevention of weight regain through the maintenance of behaviour modification. It is this long-term weight loss that will have the greatest impact on improving health outcomes and thus maintaining a healthier weight should be viewed as a life-long strategy.

References

- Aust Institute of Health & Welfare: www.aihw.gov.au
NHMRC Clinical Practice Guidelines: For the Management of Overweight and Obesity in Adults 2003
. www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/obesityguidelines-index.htm
Jung R. Br Med Bull 1997;53:307-21.
US National Weight Control Registry. www.nwcr.ws
Tate DF et al. Am J Clin Nutr 2007; 85:954-9.
Pittler & Ernst Am J Clin Nutr 2004;79:529-36.
Sjostrom L et al N Eng J Med 2007;357:741-52.
ABS National Health Survey 2004-5
NSW Schools Physical Activity & Nutrition Survey 2004.