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Keys to Finding the Right Weight Loss Program for You
A Guide to Healthy and Permanent Weight Loss



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You step on the scale. Your eyes bulge, your heart sinks, you feel bad – but you don't know what to do. The optimal solution is finding a diet or weight management plan, a plan that works not only to help you lose weight, but also to maintain that weight loss.

Benefits of a weight loss program

We live in a world of instant gratification, and the promise of dramatic and easy weight loss is often difficult to ignore. In the real world, however, true and lasting weight loss is a gradual process with many ups and downs. It requires determination, knowledge, and support from friends and family.

Losing weight, and keeping the weight off, is a heady challenge and unfortunately one that many people are unable to meet. Not only do you have to struggle through the emotions and physical hurdles of weight loss, but you also have to handle the practical aspects - like cooking dinner when zipping through the nearest drive-through is so much easier.

Imagine instead that you are not doing it alone. Imagine that you have a team behind you supporting your efforts. That team could provide you with:

Meal assistance

The food itself often receives little or no thought. We grab what is easy and tasty and go on our way. At the end of the day when you're physically and emotionally tired, or first thing in the morning as you're running like crazy to get out the door, and even during lunch when you have very little time to eat, the last thing you want to do is plan and prepare a meal.

Weight loss programs and structured diets can be essential to helping the busy person cope with mealtimes. By providing alternatives, snacks and snack options, healthy recipes and even shopping lists, the programs take the strain out of mealtimes.

Nutritional Support

You're not a nutritionist or a dietitian. You can't be expected to fully understand how your body uses food, what foods trigger cravings, or how to handle cravings and a lack

of energy. A diet or weight loss program offers a structured system of nutritional information and can be a valuable resource in your daily challenge to lose weight.

Emotional Support

Many diets and weight loss programs offer support via the Internet, telephone, and even group meetings. Being part of a group that understands what you are dealing with emotionally and physically can help you through the tough times. A group of supporters can cheer you on when you're successful, and provide support on those difficult and trying days.

Motivation

A structured diet or weight loss program can offer you the motivation that you need to reach your weight loss goals. This structure, and the simple fact of being part of a group, can serve as a motivational tool because you become accountable for your goals. Not only that, but you have a resource for motivation when you feel your willpower sliding – whether it is in the form of a group leader, a mentor, a coach or simply a daily structure that enables you to anticipate the next day.

Guidance

Many diets and weight loss programs provide coping tools and guidance on how to handle the emotional and physical strains that will arise as you make your way to your desired weight. Tools like journals, exercise plans, snacks and beverage options that help curb cravings and boost energy, and tried and true secrets to get you where you want to be the healthy way.

Healthy, lasting weight loss is attainable if you utilize all of the resources that you have available. By reaching out and incorporating a weight loss plan that addresses healthy and lasting weight loss as a lifestyle change instead of just a quick fix, you increase your chances at success and you make the process a journey rather than a series of challenges to overcome.

The trouble that many people have once they've decided to lose weight, is finding the right diet or weight loss plan. Today, there are more than 4500 diets on the market.



Diets and weight loss programs

Most diets and weight loss programs fall into the following categories:

Fixed-menu diet

A fixed-menu diet gives you a list of all the foods you can eat. The advantage of this kind of diet is that the foods are already selected and it is easy to follow. The disadvantage of this type of diet is that there is, by definition, a limited food selection and boredom can set in. Additionally, it makes spontaneity impossible, and travel or going out to eat becomes very difficult. This type of diet can work well in the short run but it lacks the lifestyle-changing eating skills that you'll need once you've reached your target weight. Presumably you don't want to eat their selected foods for the rest of your life.

Exchange diet

An exchange diet works for many because it is a meal plan with a set number of servings from each of several food groups. The structure enables you to plan ahead and offers convenience and it offers enough variety such that boredom generally isn't an issue. Within each group, foods are about equal in calories and can be interchanged as you wish. Additionally, with this type of diet you learn lifestyle skills that enable you to keep your weight off permanently.

Prepackaged diet

These diets require you to buy prepackaged meals, which is a great convenience and a structure that most people can handle successfully. However, purchasing three meals a day plus snacks can be very challenging. You do learn how to portion your food but again you don't want to eat the prepackaged food for ever, so you'll have to learn how to maintain your weight once you've reached your goal.

Formula diet

Formula diets replace one or more meals with a liquid diet drink or shake. Most formula diets are balanced diets containing a mix of protein, carbohydrates and a small amount of fat. Formula diets are usually sold as liquid or a powder to be mixed with liquid. The advantage is that weight loss is usually quick, but it is very difficult to maintain. Additionally, these types of diets do not teach weight maintenance skills.



Calorie restricted diet

This type of diet works well for rapid weight loss but is difficult to maintain. Sedentary women between the ages of 31 and 50 generally need 1800 calories per day, and men of the same age and activity level generally need around 2200 calories. A calorie restricted diet generally limits women to about 1200 calories and men around 1600 calories. This type of diet can be very difficult to stay on and there is a lack of structure. Dieters need to have a good knowledge about how many calories there are in the foods that they eat.

Fad Diet

These types of diets generally require that the dieter consume only one food or one food type for a specific period of time. Examples are the grapefruit diet, the chicken soup diet, and even the Atkins diet to a certain degree. Your body needs protein, vegetables, fiber and grains, and a small amount of healthy fat every day. Any diet that eliminates nutrition isn't a healthy weight loss choice. And though it may result in rapid weight loss, the weight will return as soon as the diet ends.

How do you choose?

With more than 4500 diets and weight loss programs to choose from, and various celebrities touting the benefits of all of them, it is difficult to decide which diet is the right diet for you. The following are important steps to finding your optimal weight management plan:

Step One: First decide if you really need to lose weight by considering the following questions:

- **What is your lifestyle?** Are you generally more physically active or sedentary? Regular physical activity and healthy eating are important, no matter what your weight or your Body Mass Index.
- **What is your family history?** Does high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, or other weight-related ailments run in your family? If so, then it's extremely important that you maintain a healthy weight.
- **What is your personal weight history?** People who have consistently gained (or repeatedly gained and lost) weight over the years need be careful of their health. Many experts say your Body Mass Index should not increase dramatically at any time of your life. Even a moderate weight gain in adulthood can increase your risk of diabetes, heart disease and more.
- **How is your weight distributed?** Extra weight near your stomach or midsection is a sure danger sign. This extra weight is an indicator of future health problems, including heart disease. A waist measurement of 40 inches or more in men and 35 inches or more in women indicates a health risk, particularly in people with a Body Mass Index of 25-34.9. Body Mass Index (BMI) is the relationship between your weight and height and a high index is associated with body fat and health risks.
- **What do the tests show?** If your cholesterol and/or blood pressure levels are high and your BMI falls into the overweight or obese category, it's important to

lose weight and maintain that weight.

- **How do you feel?** If you are overweight, joint pain, shortness of breath, trouble sleeping and moodiness are sure signs that losing weight is a must – both for your health and your quality of life.

Step Two: What should you look for in a weight loss program?

1. Your weight loss goals

How much do you need to lose? If you're very overweight or obese, then consider a structured program with a nutritionist or guidance counselor and even group support. Losing large amounts of weight is a challenge and you deserve all of the support that you can get.

If you're slightly or moderately overweight, consider a program that will teach you to make immediate lifestyle changes like portion control and better food choices. Both weight loss goals will benefit from an exercise program to not only assist in losing the weight but in maintaining your new weight.

2. Your weight loss personality

What is your weight loss personality? Some people tend to be impulsive eaters who can be tempted by the slightest suggestion. A pizza commercial on television prompts them to pick up the phone, and seeing a child eating an ice cream cone sends them to the local dairy. A chocolate bar or bag of chips on the counter doesn't stand a chance.

Other people tend to eat without paying any attention to what or when they are eating. Nighttime snacking can be one of the most difficult times. Social eaters eat when they're out with friends, and if you're a very social person then the weight can quickly build up. Emotional eaters eat when they're upset, stressed, or feeling out of control.

It is important to know your personality so that you can determine what your challenges might be and thus choose a diet program that specifically addresses your particular issues. For example, if you're a social eater then you may simply need a program that teaches portion control and proper nutrition so that when you're out you make better, more conscious, food decisions.

3. Weight loss goals

To be successful, it helps to understand why you want to lose weight and how much weight you want to or need to lose. Before you begin a weight loss plan, ask yourself:

- Am I ready to lose weight?
- What is motivating me to lose weight and will it continue to motivate me until I reach my goal?
- How will I handle weight loss setbacks, plateaus, or a complete lack of progress?
- Can I focus on losing the weight? Can I commit completely to my weight loss goal?

4. Make sure the diet is safe

Any diet should include all of the recommended daily allowances for vitamins, minerals and protein. The weight loss diet should only be lower in calories, not in essential vitamins or minerals. Consult with your doctor if you're unsure about any particular diet or weight loss program.

5. Slow, steady weight loss

Any weight loss program worth its salt understands that lasting weight loss happens slowly. The diets that promise the loss of 30 pounds in 30 days are dangerous. With most diets, you can expect to lose a pound a week after the first week or two. Often the first two weeks of a diet will result in rapid weight loss due to the loss of fluid. This weight will generally be regained when you return to a more normal diet.

6. Fees

When inquiring about a commercial weight loss program, make sure to ask for a statement of the fees and costs of additional items such as dietary supplements or foods.

7. Amenities

Other important questions to ask of any potential weight loss program include:

- If there are support staff, who determines your weight loss goals – the staff or yourself?
- Are the support staff certified to assist you? Are there weight loss counselors, nutritionists, registered dietitians, doctors and exercise physiologists available for support and consultation?
- Are your food choices flexible and suitable? Do they meet your lifestyle needs?
- What percentage of people successfully complete the program?
- What is the average weight loss of people who finish the program?
- How long does it generally take to lose the weight?
- What percentage of participants have problems or side effects? What are they?
- Does the program encourage exercise as a part of the weight loss program?
- Does the program teach you lifestyle changes so that you can maintain your weight once you've reached your goal?
- Does the program provide what you are looking for? If you're looking for a group support system, does the program meet those needs? If you're looking for a

structured meal plan, does it provide that structure?

- Does the program utilize weight loss medications? If your chosen program suggests weight loss medication, supplements or 'alternative remedies', you should first speak with your doctor.
- Does the program screen you for health risks? If you are extremely overweight, you should look for a program that takes your health situation and risks into consideration when making recommendations.
- Does your program include plans for weight maintenance after you've reached your target weight? Yo-Yo dieting is detrimental to your health. It is important to find a program that teaches you how to maintain a healthy weight for life.



Make your weight loss easy and permanent

Set Attainable Goals

Often when we decide that we need to lose weight the first thing that we do is pick a number. “I need to lose 10 pounds.” “I need to lose 50 pounds.”

We jump right in without thinking, and choose an ideal number out of the air without ever considering what “reasonable weight loss” is, what an ideal body weight is, or how we’re going to achieve our goal.

Goal setting, any kind of goal setting, is important. But more important is that you set a series of goals that are attainable, together with a plan of action. For example, “I am going to lose 5 pounds in 30 days by walking for 20 minutes each day and by eliminating all unhealthy snacks (except one snack during the weekend).” Remember that you live in the real world and that depriving yourself completely may result in diet backlash.

Your health and safety are important!

Check with your doctor.

If you plan on losing more than 15-20 pounds, then it is highly recommended that you speak with your physician first before beginning any weight loss program. Often a full blood work will be conducted to make sure that a chosen diet will not cause any health problems. For example, people that are pre-diabetic or anemic may have special weight loss concerns and a physician’s guidance is both helpful and necessary.

Don’t cut too many calories!

You need to eat. Even if you’re a sedentary person, a female aged 19-30 needs to consume 2000 calories a day. 31-50 year old females need 1800 calories a day and their male counterparts need 2,200. Add exercise into the equation, something you really should do if you want to lose weight faster and keep it off, and you need more calories. Remember, your goal is a slow weight loss that you can keep off for life.

Make sure you're diet is well rounded.

High protein diets and certain elimination diets are fine for the short term but if you completely deprive your body of essential nutrients then it's going to rebel eventually. Make sure that you pay attention to the signals your body is giving you while you're on a diet. Be aware that while the first 30 days of any weight loss program are the most difficult — particularly if you're eliminating sugary foods – you should still be able to function.

Losing weight is never easy but with the right weight loss program or diet, it can be accomplished and you can keep the weight off for the rest of your life. A good weight loss program will empower you to change your life and make lifestyle changes that you can maintain no matter what your busy life throws at you or what temptations cross your path.

