

Successful, Healthy Weight Loss - Part 1

There is no magic or secret to weight loss-it is about basic human physiology. Understand what's happening in your body -you can make more informed choices and typically lose weight for good. That's a pretty profound statement because the new year always seems to bring about the urge to, "get in shape"-which certainly means a lot of things to a lot of different people. But with the more current statistics of the nation's obesity rate topping over 30%, it is safe to assume that fat loss is or possibly should be-a priority for many of us.

Many commercials or reality TV shows would have you believe that it's relatively easy to lose weight quickly. However, fat loss commonly happens through a very particular set of circumstances within your body-which may seem like a degree of "deprivation". For the most part, the old axiom, "calories in/calories out" is pretty true, and there is no shortcut around it.

Your weight is a balancing act, but the equation remains fairly simple: if you eat more calories than you burn, then you gain weight. If you eat fewer calories than you burn, you lose weight. Liquid calories are the worst! A very important point when talking about calories is that each and every one of us needs to appreciate that a calorie from a candy bar is different than a calorie from a piece of broccoli. The potential metabolic energy in a calorie from a candy bar is certainly different than the supercharged calorie from a piece of broccoli. With that said, the word "calorie" was not created to make you feel guilty for eating. It's merely a unit of measurement that defines energy. Each calorie is a little packet of energy your body uses to run itself.

When balanced, eating gives your body just the right amount of energy and you can maintain your weight. When you give it too much, you gain weight. Your body is essentially a product of millennia of evolution, during most of which of that time food was scarce. To keep each of us from starving to death when there was no food for a few days, your body developed a habit of storing extra calories as fat. This way, when energy was needed, it could tap into those reserves instead of slowing down organ function which is optimally not good.

When forced to live off of our fat reserves for an extended period of time, the fat cells themselves shrink and you get thinner. So if you want to get thinner, just live off your fat reserves, right? Unfortunately it is not quite that simple. We already have the fat reserves. If we reduce the incoming calories to avoid restocking the same reserves were trying to empty we usually lose weight. But if we reduce too far, our body will fight back-it sees that those fat reserves of the only thing standing between you and slow death by starvation, so our body gradually reduces the amount of energy it needs to keep you going. Essentially, it is just budgeting the fat reserves, so it doesn't go through them too quickly. If the depletion of incoming

calories goes on for too long, our body will begin breaking down muscle tissue for energy, keeping the fat reserves in place for when things really get tough.

Depletion of muscle tissue is bad news! Muscle tissue requires more energy to survive than fat tissue. Fat itself just typically sits around, but muscle tissue works for you. Muscle tissue makes us stronger and less prone to injury, and it keeps our body functioning at a markedly higher level. It takes more calories to sustain a muscular body, so in times of deprivation, your body will try to let muscle go before raiding the fat reserves. When that happens, your body needs fewer calories to survive, so the fat stores become even less likely to be tapped.

The important part to remember is to only reduce the incoming energy by small amounts, while increasing your outgoing energy. In other words, eat less, move more. Taking in 500 calories fewer than your body needs everyday results in a pound of fat loss per week. If you create that deficit by only reducing the incoming calories, you risk the muscle breakdown we just talked about. But if you add exercise, you work your muscles enough that they stand a constant repair/growth cycle and keep your body running on higher energy.

Your body will not reduce its caloric needs as dramatically, because it has all this muscle tissue to maintain, so it is more likely to dip into the fat stores when energy is running low. The caveat to all this is that each calorie has a different amount of potential energy in it. So the person who states they're just going to enhance their diet with doughnuts is going to have little overall long-term energy in those calories. For the individual who says I'm going to reduce my calories especially of simple sugars; but, I'm going to eat more vegetables-those individuals will have more bountiful energy.

Our fat cells are like little bubbles filled with fat. The actual number of fat cells when you lose weight doesn't really change. If you're losing weight, you are just reducing the size of those fat cells. If you're gaining weight, you are increasing the size of the fat cells.

When your body turns to your fat stores for energy, it selectively siphons a little bit of fat out of all the fat cells all over your body. Over time, those fat cells will be nearly empty and you will visually look smaller because the fat cells have become smaller. That is also why spot-reduction does not work on a natural weight loss basis. There's nothing you can do short of lipo- suction to make it happen in only one place. Your biggest body part will typically be the last to become thin because it just has more stored fat to work through. But if you stay consciously active about your weight reduction, biology will work on your side and you will lose weight.

Since 3500 calories equals about 1 pound of fat, if you cut 500 calories from your typical diet each day as I mentioned above, you will lose approximately 1 pound a week (500 calories, x 7 days =3500 calories). If that equation is true and it is-why is weight loss so hard?

That is the question we have an answer in part 2 of this article.

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