

What is the **Truth** about losing weight?

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Past, present, future

I went to a physiotherapy presentation recently and it was suggested that the future of physiotherapy would not be in the area of sports injuries, back pain, muscle aches and pains, but would be more related to chronic illness, diabetes, heart disease, overweight and obesity management.

In fact in the last 20 years there has been an extraordinary increase in child and adult obesity, such that now over 50 % of Australians are overweight and about 20% could be classified obese.

Though these are just statistics, when you are personally affected, have a family member affected, friend or associate affected by these problems, it can be a frustrating, frightening, difficult and confusing issue.

There is a lot of information out there about “overweight” and the associated complications, some of which appear conflicting, and every one seems to have an opinion.

Remember it is also not just weight, but where the fat is distributed which matters. Even a small amount of abdominal fat in a relatively thin person can lead to health risk.

Many of you may have tried to lose weight and found it difficult, or had lost weight then ended up putting it on again or even more.

The Heart Foundation also recently stated that 50% of people’s health resolutions fail by 6 months.

So what is the TRUTH about losing weight, and gaining health and wellbeing?

- The truth is that our knowledge about this issue is evolving all the time.
- The truth is also that the issue is not simple. (Fat around the abdomen appears to especially lead to heart, diabetes and other health risks.)
- The truth is that we are all different and will require a unique approach to dealing with the issue.
- The truth is we need to consider more than just weight.

What the b---- do we know?

So based on the science what do we know so far?

- Diet is the number one thing to losing weight.

- Exercise is the number one thing to maintain weight loss, or to stop you getting over weight in the first place.
- Combining diet and exercise improves the result, and exercise with diet provides a better loss of fat around the waist than diet alone.
- BUT these 2 things alone don't always work.

You need to also consider:

- Sleep – too little sleep can lead to weight gain.
- Stress – chronic high cortisol from too much stress contributes to abdominal fat.
- Genetics – are you a fat storer or a fat burner? Consider your other family members.
- Being Female changes how well exercise works for weight loss.
- Low birth weight – contributes to later life increased weight.
- Mind body aspects – brain, hormonal, immune system can all influence weight loss and weight gain.
- Eating behaviour – Does exercise make you hungry? Do you comfort eat?
- Alcohol use.- alcohol contributes to weight gain.
- Low grade chronic Inflammation can lead to difficulty losing weight.
- Toxins eg pesticides, stored in fat can inhibit burning of fat.
- Ethnic groups eg people from a cold climate are more likely to be fat burners (vs people from warmer climates).
- Insulin resistance, as occurs with diabetes, can interfere with weight loss.
- Some medicines can lead to weight gain.

So what is the best diet to lose weight?

- One which reduces your energy intake. How can you do this? Reduce your portion size.
- One which keeps you healthy and is not extreme.
- One which can help with the above issues, if it is a problem for you.
- In other words a specific diet to meet your needs. This is where help from a professional can help.
- Growing research indicates that a Mediterranean-like diet can be helpful, as it can be kept going in the long term, and does help address some of the problems described above.

What is the best exercise?

Aerobic

Most weight lost research is based upon this type of exercise, usually at a moderate level. Generally more than 60 minutes on most days is required to prevent weight gain, and more may be needed to lose weight for people who are over weight ie 90 plus minutes on most days of the week.

Interval

A university of NSW study found for over weight women who rode exercise bikes for 20 minutes doing interval exercise – 8 secs intense and 12 secs easy, lost 3 times more fat than riding for 40 minutes aerobically, over a fifteen week period. This strategy could be applied to walking, swimming, running, and rowing also. They believe the effect was due to catecholamines

– hormones like adrenaline. Interval training could be a great strategy for women, especially if normal exercise is not working. However interval training is more intense, so its risks are also higher, so you should be assessed by your doctor and/or physio to check if this type of exercise is suitable for you.

Strength Training

Strength training, including isometric strength training, generally only leads to a small amount of weight or fat loss, but importantly helps to gain muscle mass, lose fat around your middle, and improve your health.

CARE - Watch that increasing your exercises doesn't lead to reduced over all activity ie because you're tired and have over done it.

Sport

It is not clear how sport may help, but it does add to your activity level.

Just being active

People who are spontaneously active tend to be thinner, but whether this helps to lose weight is not fully known, but being active is associated with being healthier.

How much moderate exercise and physical activity do you need to do on most days of the week?

- *Remember – doing anything is better than doing nothing.*
- 30 minutes – probably has no effect on weight but certainly has health benefits.
- 60 minutes – usually the amount of activity to stop weight gain in over weight people.
- 90 minutes – probably the realistic amount over weight people need to do to lose weight.
- More vigorous and interval exercise requires less time to produce weight changing benefits, but has higher risks.
- The good thing is you can put it together – it doesn't need to be all done at once. For example you could do 3 lots of 10 minutes, 4 lots of 15 minutes, 3 lots of 30 minutes, etc.

Patience, practice, perseverance, planning

Remember the exercise you choose needs to be fun, as exercise and activity is for life. My approach is one of variety. I love to run, but I also walk, bush walk, cycle, garden, strength train, and practice physical yoga. What is best for you?

Setting a Goal is important for weight loss

The problem is putting it into practice.

Life, family and work get in the way.

You need to find a reason why you want to lose weight?

And get your family and friends involved.

Take it easy; don't let your program become a stress. Remember stress can lead to cortisol increase and difficulty with weight loss.

Make a plan.

Record what you do.

Get lots of support and help from a team of professionals if required. Use your doctor, physio, naturopath, podiatrist if feet issues, yoga teacher, and/or other traditional health practitioner such as ayurveda or Chinese medicine.

Be careful of BOOT camp, high intensity personal training from inexperienced trainers, as this can lead to injury if you are de-conditioned, and prevent you exercising for the long term.

The good thing is if you are not currently overweight it is easier to keep yourself that way than trying to lose weight, and exercise is one of the most effective ways to stop weight gain if you are in a healthy weight range.

"A lot of people are fat despite having a good diet and a high level of physical activity, but being 'fat and fit' is much healthier than being lean and unfit. Those overweight people who don't have excessive fat around their abdomen and don't have low grade inflammation typically stay healthy and don't become diabetics"
Quote

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