

## Diets don't work



### The ubiquitous diet and slimming products!

It is not surprisingly now that over half the population are conscious that they are overweight, there are plenty of people happy to cash in, and slimming products have become big business. Get thin fast remedies are on every page of every magazine it seems, and there are a whole host of "quick" or "pain free fixes" are on the market. On top of this you could add any number of the latest fad diets and the unlimited supply of slimming snacks, drinks and even get thin gum, just waiting to take your cash! Slimming and diets are big business, however sadly they don't work, and often there's a hefty price to pay.

### "Lose ten pounds in a week!"

Next time you see one of these claims, just ask yourself 'ten pounds of what?' It's only physically possible to lose between one and a half to two pounds of fat in a week, and you don't want to lose anything else!

If you adopt a crash diet, and suddenly cut your food intake dramatically (which a lot of diets recommend), your body may assume there's a famine on the way and start saving your precious fat stores by burning muscle instead. Added to this, you will probably lose a lot of water and glucose, making your weight drop dramatically, and making you think everything is just fine. However, things won't be just fine at all, in fact, the combination of the water loss, and the muscle tissues that you have lost, is very bad news indeed.

**Why is this bad news?** - The reason that this is bad news is simple; you only want to lose fat!

- And since your muscles are the most efficient fat burning machinery in your body, why would you want to lose, or shrink or worse still damage them. Furthermore, your heart happens to be a pretty important muscle in your body, and it could also be on the menu too during a crash diet. During crash dieting you will lose 1lb of muscle for every 1lb of fat.
- Following several weeks of this type of diet, you will almost certainly "hit the wall" and weight loss will become more and more difficult to achieve. There are several reasons for this, not least of which is that your body is smarter than you think, and in times of potential famine, your metabolism will slow down in order to avoid starvation.
- You will also now be struggling more because your lean body mass is now considerably reduced, meaning that your basal metabolic requirements (the energy required to simply make you tick over) is now correspondingly reduced and you can survive on less food than previously. Therefore the body has successfully adapted itself to require fewer calories, allowing it to maintain its stores of fat, and avoid potential starvation for longer. Severe caloric restrictions of this type can suppress the metabolism by as much as 45%. The more calories are restricted, the more the body will cling to its fat stores and metabolism will slow further.

### A downward spiral!

Once the whole diet is complete and you feel you have achieved your target weight, inevitably, it will be impossible to stick to the drastically reduced food intake, so you begin to eat normally once again. However, now because you have considerably reduced your lean body mass (mainly muscles) your calorie requirement is significantly less than before, and returning to your previous eating habits will create a larger energy surplus than before you started the diet.

Furthermore, following restrictive dieting, there is a phenomenon known as "rebound binge eating" which is the bodies attempt to quickly get you back to your previous weight to which it had become accustomed

## "DiETING makes you fat!"

For this reason people always pile on the pounds very quickly following a diet. Also future calorie burning is now more difficult, and subsequent diets will always seem harder than the last. This is the start of the damaging cycle that is symptomatic of crash dieting, it is also where the phrase "DiETING makes you fat!" comes from, and clearly this statement has some justification. Furthermore, clinical data from eating disorder patients has suggested that the development of binge eating was invariably preceded by strict dieting (Wardle & Beinart 1981).

It is no surprise that dieting promotes obsessive behaviour, and perpetrates an unhealthy relationship with food and eating traits. Many people fall into the trap of being in "dieting mode", or "free fall"

### **Avoid diets or products that claim the following:**

- Claims or implies a large or fast weight loss (more than one to two pounds per week).
- Implies weight can be lost and maintained without exercise and other lifestyle changes.
- Is described as miraculous, a breakthrough, exclusive, ancient etc....
- Relies heavily on undocumented case histories, uses before and after photos and testimonials.

Only 10% of slimmers will have retained their new slim weight after 9 months and only about 5% after 3 years.

## **So, if dieting doesn't work, what does?**

Well, there are three elements to successful weight management:

- Motivation – Positive mind set
- Nutrition – The right information
- Activity - Becoming more active

These three "Lifestyle" factors are vital components of any person's life. Without a sensible and balanced approach to each and every one of them, then as sure as night follows day, you will reap what you sow at some point in the future.

### **Calorie intake - calorie expenditure = calorie deficit/surplus**

Although this equation is too simplistic to provide all the answers to successful weight management, it remains the foundation of maintaining a healthy body weight.

In order to fully understand the energy balance equation, it is necessary to start to reconcile the energy input against energy output. In order to do this, we must recognise the values of the foods that we are eating and the activities that we are undertaking.

Most packaged foods have calorific values, but fresh and natural produce don't. Furthermore cooked foods or takeaways can vary tremendously, and can be difficult to calculate. A general approach is usually the best way, and by learning a few values each week, you will soon get a good idea of your daily values.

Activity values are more straight forward, and the chart below is a good guide for estimating energy expenditure.