

Personal Training by Robert J. Bovee

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FOOD, NUTRITION, AND HEALTH

CAUTION: DIETING MAY MAKE YOU FATTER, NOT THINNER

Experts have warned for years that **repetitive dieting**, especially with quick loss diets, **can be dangerous for your health**. Yet, Americans stubbornly continue to diet. However, now there is an argument that may finally convince people to stop dieting and simply eat sensibly to achieve a healthy weight. Repetitive dieting actually can make you fatter. The fatter problem with diets, as many of us have experienced first-hand, is that when you go off the diet you tend to gain back the weight you lost. This leads to a tricky situation. When you diet and lose weight, you lose both fat and muscle tissue. When you gain back that weight, you gain mostly fat, but not much muscle. Even if you weigh the same as before, you are fatter. That is, you have more fat and less muscle and lean tissue than you had before the diet. For example, if you weigh 115 pounds, you may have 25% of that body weight as fat, a healthy percentage for an average woman. After several weight gains and losses, body fat percentage may increase to as high as 40% even though your weight has returned to around 115 pounds. The more you diet, lose weight, gain it back, and then lose it again, the fatter you are likely to become. The extra body fat can also increase your risk of heart disease, and along that disastrous route of yo-yo dieting, your body is losing vital muscle tissue. The loss of muscle and lean tissue leads to more problems. Muscle tissue burns more calories than fat tissue does. When you lose muscle and lean tissue, you lose calorie burning abilities. After dieting you'll gain weight faster because your body burns fewer calories.

In one study, a group of rats was put on a low-calorie and then a high-calorie diet, so that their weight fluctuated. On the weight loss diet, the rats took 21 days to lose a certain amount of weight, and then 46 days to gain it back. The second time they were put on the low-calorie diet, it took twice as long (45 days) to lose the same amount of weight they had lost the first time, but they gained back the weight in less than one-third the time (14 days). The body, which fortunately has evolved for survival rather than for fashion purposes, doesn't like diets. Give your body too few calories and it will think it is being threatened with starvation. It will cope by lowering the rate at which you burn calories so that you can survive on fewer calories.

If weight loss is one of your goals, achieve it sensibly:

*Avoid fad diets that promise quick weight loss. A ten pound weight loss in 10 days may be very tempting, but such losses are usually achieved by water loss, not fat loss. Each pint of fluid lost weighs approximately one pound. Remember that one pound of fat equals 3500 calories. To lose 10 pounds in 10 days one would need to decrease calorie intake by 3500 calories per day, while the total caloric intake each day for many adults is only 1500 to 2000 calories

*Learn to eat a variety of nutritious (nutrient dense) foods and avoid empty calorie foods (high in calories and low in nutrition). So often we dilute the nutrient density of a food with fat, sugar or alcohol. Take the potato: a baked potato is nutrient dense, while the potato chip is an empty calorie choice.

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*Set a reasonable weight loss goal of 1/2 to 1 pound per week! As you slowly lose, you adjust habits that will help you maintain your loss. An excellent tool to help you evaluate your dietary change is a daily food diary. Record everything you eat and when it is eaten. Also record your mood and the circumstances. You may find that you use food to comfort yourself. You may also become aware of the amount of empty calorie foods you eat each day. Identify some non-caloric rewards and try switching from the empty-calorie, high fat foods (such as the morning donut) to a more nutrient- dense choice (such as a slice of multi grain toast with natural peanut butter). The changes will help you achieve your weight goal. They may also lead to new, healthy, lifetime habits.

*Finally, exercise. This is an important key to successful weight loss and weight maintenance. Find ways to increase the number of calories your body burns. Discover the stairs at work. Enjoy the extra walk when you can't find a parking spot in the front row, and develop an exercise routine that you enjoy. For weight loss, regular enjoyable exercise is more important than maximum intensity exercise. When you decided to lose those pounds, do it right. Remember, dieting may make you fatter.

For more information, please contact Robert J. Bovee at **(585) 330-0614**.