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*NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with PROJECT: PFC's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.*

## Lifestyle Intervention Beats Diet for Weight Loss: 6 Simple Changes to Make Today

As a nutritionist, for years I've seen the pendulum swing back and forth as to which "diet" works best for weight loss: low-carb, high-carb, low-fat, the fill-in-the-blank diet (rice diet, grapefruit diet, peanut butter diet), you name it. The diet rage of the day just leaves overweight individuals confused as to the best way to lose weight and keep unwanted pounds off. It turns out that we may just be better off forgetting the word "diet" altogether, according to an editorial published last week in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).



Two researchers, Sherry Pagoto of the University of Massachusetts Medical and Bradley Appelhans of the Rush University Medical Center, call for an end to the diet wars, because they write that they are all equally as good, or bad, in helping lose weight. In the report, "A Call for an End to the Diet Debates," they make the case that lifestyle changes trump diet in fighting the battle of the bulge.

As a nutritionist recommending lifestyle changes over diet, I couldn't be happier with this report. I've seen clients try different diets over and over, just to fall off the wagon, get discouraged, and then try a different diet. Which is why I am more concerned helping clients stick with a plan they can follow while incorporating lifestyle changes they can stick with. One of the major problems with diets is adherence, which is so hard for so many overweight people struggling to shed unwanted pounds.

Indeed, as the authors write in the report:

"The only consistent finding among the trials is that adherence -- the degree to which participants continued in the program or met program goals for diet and physical activity -- was most strongly associated with weight loss and improvement in disease-related outcomes."

As reported in Fox News:

"In the end, patients only get confused thinking that one diet is superior to another, they said, when in fact changes in lifestyle, not diet types, are the true ways to prevent weight gain and the associated ills of diabetes and circulatory disease."

Lifestyle interventions involve a three pronged approach: making dietary changes, exercising more, and incorporating behavior modification techniques.

Here are six simple lifestyle changes you can make to get you on the road to permanent weight loss. I have used these techniques, along with others, with much success in my private practice helping clients lose weight and keep it off.

## **1. Practice portion control.**

As an advocate for portion control, watching how much you eat is one of the best ways to lose weight. I have been counseling clients for years, and I have seen in my private practice that when clients watch the sizes of their portions (aka eat less), they shave hundreds of calories daily, and lose weight effortlessly. While it may seem obvious that larger portions have more calories than smaller portions, most people don't recognize just how many more calories a large portion contains.

Another advantage to practicing portion control is that you do not have to cut out entire food groups to get thin and you get to indulge in your favorite treat every now and then. No dieting and no deprivation.

## **2. Think positive.**

Instead of dwelling on the foods you cannot eat, try instead to focus on what you can have. I tell my clients that there is no restaurant that is completely off limits. You can always find something healthy to eat. For example, when going to an Italian restaurant, instead of dwelling on the fact that you shouldn't eat fettuccine alfredo, called a "heart attack on a plate" by the Center of Science for the Public Interest, think instead of what you can eat: whole wheat pasta with veggies and fresh tomato sauce or fresh grilled fish with sautéed spinach.

## **3. Keep food records.**

There is no better way to get a handle on what and how much you eat than by keeping food records. And, for the good news you do not have to keep records forever. People who keep records are generally more aware of the mistakes they make and are then able to make corrections. Food records help you see your patterns, both positive and negative ones. For example, are you nibbling in front of the TV without realizing it, are you famished when you get home from work so you eat whatever is on the counter. By identifying your bad habits, you can easily find substitutes for new habits.

## **4. Eat structured meals and snacks.**

Speaking of nibbling and mindless munching, one advantage to eating structured meals and snacks is that you tend to get famished less often. And when we are famished, we tend to just grab whatever food is in sight. And, we also often end up grabbing junk food. Planning in advance is also important. Keep healthy foods at arms reach and bring along a fruit and yogurt if you know that it will be hard to buy something healthy midafternoon.

## **5. Move more.**

All exercise helps. The key is to do what you enjoy and follow an exercise program you can stick with. You do not have to spend thousands of dollars on a fancy gym. Lifestyle activities also add up. For example, take the stairs and walk around the block at lunch. I also advise taking advantage of different exercises you enjoy during the different seasons: swimming outdoors in the summer, taking a walk on the beach, and skiing in winter. The key is to follow an exercise program that you can stick with for the long haul.

## **6. Cut yourself some slack.**

I am a big advocate of focusing on progress, not perfection. It is important to take stock of the changes you've made so far and look at the big picture. For example, if you need to lose 50 pounds, and already lost 10 pounds, recognize your accomplishment, instead of complaining that you have 40 more pounds to lose. One way to recognize your progress is to try on some old clothes. Seeing that they are too loose can help you actually see your accomplishment.

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