



Beating obesity takes a lifelong commitment

America sometimes appears to be a country of extremes when it comes to weight issues. Thousands of thin people are worried that they are overweight, yet many of those who are part of the "obesity epidemic" have given up exercising or trying to eat sanely.

Both groups will be making resolutions to lose weight. And as New Year's Day approaches, the volume of weight loss (not fat loss) messages will exponentially increase.

Surgeon General David Satcher is swinging into action to deal with the "obesity epidemic." Satcher brought together several panels of experts to develop a "National Action Plan on Overweight and Obesity." These panels cut through all the hype and confusion about weight control and developed a visionary and realistic action plan to help the nation reverse the obesity trend.

The surgeon general's action plan is a rational, culturally sensitive, science-based plan with a lifelong focus. And the plan appropriately stresses improved health rather than appearance.

Too many Americans have been sucked into weight-loss schemes and scams that encourage unrealistic weight-loss goals. Virtually all these promotions are based on tes-

timonials from people who have supposedly lost a great deal of weight in a short period of time. As convincing as these stories seem to be, they are either fictitious or represent extreme water loss rather than fat loss.

Researchers find that overweight people expect to lose too much too fast. This puts them on a weight-loss roller coaster that has some big weight drops, but over time, body fat goes soaring. This roller coaster also has its emotional ups and downs. And over time, people become discouraged and feel defeated.

Earlier this year, we reported on research findings that active and fit overweight people have fewer health problems than normal weight sedentary people. Clearly, the surgeon general is right. The focus needs to be on fitness rather than weight loss.

Most all baby boomers remember physical education classes that were required in intermediate and high-school years. That seems to be a thing of the past in most school districts. Without these classes, greater emphasis must be put on other opportunities for children and teenagers to get regular physical activity.

The Surgeon General's Action Plan considers weight control is-

sues across the life span.

>> To start, it encourages that infants be breast-fed, as they will less likely become overweight as adults. Also, mothers who breast-feed tend to return to their pre-pregnancy weight more quickly.

>> Children and teenagers should be encouraged to stay active. Limit sedentary activities such as watching television and playing computer games. Children should have at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. Adults should get at least 30 minutes.

>> The Action Plan also addresses diet, recommending that people emphasize eating more lower-calorie foods like fruits and vegetables while reducing foods that are high in fat, calories and added sugar.

>> Finally, it recommends returning to portion sizes that are not as excessive as has become common.

Since quick weight-loss "money-back-guaranteed" pills and potions haven't worked, it's time to take the recommendations of experts who actually care about your long-term health. Focus on fitness and eat a reasonable diet to maintain weight and health.

Alan Titchenal, Ph.D, CNS and Joannie Dobbs, Ph.D, CNS
are nutritionists in the Department of Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Sciences,
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, UH-Manoa.
Dr. Dobbs also works with the University Health Service.
