



# Cut calories and add exercise to lose fat, not muscle

Last week's big health story was about one in five American adults being obese. And again, it was reported that the incidence of obesity in Hawaii's children is twice the national average.

What is behind this growing trend? The simple answer is that people gain weight when they consume more calories than they expend. Based on this simplistic premise, people just need to eat less. Regrettably, obesity is a more complex problem.

And many people make the assumption that obese people lack self-control. In most cases, this is far from the truth.

Research shows that obese children eat similarly to normal-weight children of similar ages. The energy balance becomes lopsided because heavier children typically exercise and move around a lot less than their lean peers.

No doubt this holds true for adults as well. Adult's lives may be extremely hectic, but that doesn't translate into using a great number of calories. Jobs requiring a lot of sitting, as well as various labor-saving devices at home, have decreased calorie needs compared to even 10 years ago.

Research also indicates that individuals may have a genetic susceptibility to becoming obese. Animal studies, along with the study of par-

ticular groups of people, such as the Pima Indians, have demonstrated beyond a doubt that genetic predisposition plays a major role in the development of obesity for some individuals.

When you add to any of these factors the ever-growing food portions served at most food establishments, the major elements come together to make obesity virtually inevitable.

If you watch the infomercials or read the hundreds of quick-weight-loss books, then likely your weight-loss expectations are more than just a little unrealistic. And the quicker the weight loss, the worse you could be making the problem.

The real goal to healthy weight loss is losing fat while building muscle. To set the record straight, losing a significant amount of body fat (not water weight) and maintaining the loss can require a great deal of patience and consistent changes in lifestyle.

For example, 4 pounds of body fat contains enough calories to fuel the average person for about one week. But if the average person goes on a one-week water fast, a lot less than 4 pounds of fat will be lost. In fact, this type of dieting causes the body to break down muscle to meet its energy needs, and decreased muscle decreases calorie needs. Quick weight loss can be the first step to a life-long weight problem.

To complicate the situation, decreasing a person's calorie intake by 300 to 400 calories per day below their calorie requirement can increase protein needs by at least 25 percent. Consequently, weight-loss diets that lower protein too much can be counter-productive.

Eating carbohydrate-containing foods is important, too, because carbohydrate provides glucose -- the major fuel for the brain and a key fuel source during moderate- to high-intensity exercise. Too little dietary carbohydrate just decreases your stamina for mental tasks and a good exercise workout.

Cutting down on fat in the diet is the most efficient way to reduce calories. But decreasing fat below about 30 grams per day can cause deficiencies in some vitamins as well as the omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids required by the body for essential functions such as blood-pressure regulation.

In the final analysis, the best overall fat loss involves three things:

>> Decreasing overall calorie intake by about 100 to 500 calories per day.

>> Adding 30 to 60 minutes of daily movement to your life.

>> Being patient and consistent. True fat loss takes time and must be gradual.

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