



### Put focus on fitness, not weight loss

Don't let New Year's dieting drive you and your family insane. OK, "insane" might be too strong a word, but since the Minnesota semistarvation study was conducted during World War II, it has been clear that restricted calorie intake can have powerful psychological effects on a person's mental state. If calories are cut too drastically or for too long, people naturally become obsessed with food. Like the men in the starvation study, dieters can become irritable and short-tempered. The brain naturally goes into "survival mode" imploring the dieter to consume the calories and nutrients needed to keep the body alive and well.

When the focus is put on weight loss instead of getting fit, there is a high risk of failure. To avoid driving yourself, family and friends crazy this year, think about these things:

1) Focus on fitness before weight loss. Several large studies have indicated that being overweight (but not obese) is not necessarily a risk. Some

studies even report a lower risk of chronic disease in overweight people than people of normal weight, especially when the overweight person is physically active.

2) If you need to lose weight, don't try to lose weight quickly. Fast loss is mostly muscle loss and not fat loss. It might be satisfying to watch the scale drop, but a quick weight loss lowers the metabolic rate, making it more difficult to maintain weight.

3) Meet all of your essential nutrient needs. If you are counting calories and eating less food than usual, it is much more difficult to obtain all of the vitamins, minerals, fats and proteins required by the body. Most weight loss experts suggest that dieting is a good time to take a multivitamin/mineral supplement to make sure essential nutrient needs are met.

4) Maintain a healthy intake of protein. When calories drop below daily needs, protein needs actually go up. Dr. Donald Layman at the University of

Illinois has found that dieters' protein needs are about double standard recommendations for the average person. Depending on someone's usual eating style, they might already be consuming this much protein and will do best to cut back on high-fat and high-carbohydrate foods. Others might need to focus on getting enough protein if they are not used to getting plenty in their diet.

5) Aim for an achievable goal. The American Medical Association and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend at least 30 minutes of physical activity at least five days a week along with 10 minutes a day of stretching and light muscle training. Set up a plan with a friend to meet these recommendations for the next three months, and it could become a lifelong habit.

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