

Dieting Essentials

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A diet can refer to not only the selection of particular foods to control weight and/or physical condition, but also the foods that we eat most often. Therefore, for someone to say that they are constantly on a diet can be correct if used in the context of the latter definition. But all too often they mean that they are constantly trying to control their food intake in order to reduce their weight.

Nutritionists' recommendations are the same regardless of preferences aim for an optimum combination of healthy food intake for a successful weight control programme with the ultimate aim of long-term health.

A matter of balance

To lose weight, we merely need to consume less food and drink. Once our intake is less than that required to satisfy the demand we place on our body, weight reduction will take place. Alternatively, weight loss can be achieved by increasing the amount of physical activity it is simply a matter of balance.

For a longer term programme, both factors should be part of your dieting habits. This will ensure that fat rather than muscle is targeted by your diet and workout. Note that muscle can also be used up during heavy physical activity if insufficient nourishment is consumed.

Carbohydrate-based foods are constantly referred to by diet experts. But why should the level of this particular type of food be increased and others decreased during dieting? The answer is fairly simple.

Carbohydrates normally have around half the calories of fatty foods. Weight for weight, when compared to protein, carbohydrates contain less calories. This is why most low-fat foods are high in carbohydrates and sugars, yet low in calories the sugars making them more palatable.

But you should remember that overeating low-calorie foods will still result in weight gain. Even though you are taking in fewer calories, consumption should still be limited to that needed to maintain the level of physical activity undertaken.

The right fuels

What to do, how to do it and how often to do it for maximum weight loss are the basics that an exercise routine must cover.

Whether you workout longer or more frequently, you will need to consume more food to support your activity. If you succeed in using more energy than can be supported from the food you take in, then weight loss will occur.

Those who have had a break or are just starting an exercise routine should take it easy. To put this in perspective, the amount of energy required to run five kilometres is exactly the same as the amount of energy required to walk the same distance the difference is the time taken to achieve calorie burn. Do not over-exert your body in the early stages. At the least you will be deterred from achieving your goals, at worst you could sustain an injury.

In simple terms there are two fuels that will be required to supply the calories you are going to burn: fat and glucose. Glucose stores within the body are limited. When you start to get dizzy and feel weak, your body is telling you that you are running low on glucose.

Accordingly it is important to keep glucose levels topped up. But where can you get a ready supply of glucose to keep you going? This is where the carbohydrates come in.

Snacking while on an exercise routine is actually not a bad thing, as long as it's the correct type of snack. A high-carbohydrate snack around 20 to 30 minutes before an exercise session can provide the glucose required to see you through your workout. These glucose stores should also be topped up after a hard workout.

Avoid quick fixes

Ranging from detox type diets through to single food diets, fad diets do not hold true to their promises and often result in a negative approach to future attempts at diet control. Some programmes claim that you can get all the nourishment you need from one form of nutrient only. Others say you should combine different types of foods in your diet, and yet others say you should not. All in all, it can be very confusing!

So what should be believed and what should be ignored? The best advice is: if it is offering a quick fix, avoid it. Remember, it is a lifestyle change that will be needed, not a brief spell following a different style of eating.

The principles of single food type diets are not normally based on evidence. If they are followed for a long period of time, they can lead to nutrient deficiencies. Beware of high protein dieting. Although there may be some short-term gains, in the longer run they could have a negative outcome. These forms of diet control, also known as low-carbohydrate diets, have been issued with warnings related to heart issues by reputable health watch agencies such as the American Heart Association.

Long-term considerations Remember, the action that you take in adjusting what you eat should be considered for its long-term effects. We are considering the term diet as covering what you normally eat all the time, as well as what you consume to meet a short-term goals.

Always think about your long-term health related goals when you are thinking of a dietary change.

Dieting should be regarded as what it really is the food we eat to maintain the lifestyle we lead. If you want to change your dietary habits to meet a short-term goal, fine, but also consider the long-term effects this can have on both your eating habits and on your health.

Stick to basics as long as you use up what you take in then your body will be in balance. Ensure that there is a balance of the different types of nutrients and foodstuffs in your diet. If you wish to reduce weight, eat more carbohydrates as they have less calories per unit than most other types of food.

And most of all, enjoy your eating experience. Good foods can be very tasty as well as healthy