

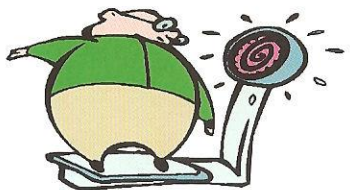
STEPS TO WELLNESS – LESSON 7

Handling the Overweight Problem

Weight management is of growing interest in western society. Being overweight (10-20% above ideal weight) or obese (more than 20% above ideal weight) is a problem that affects children, teenagers and adults, and can result in major health problems. In 1983, 58% of the population was overweight; in 1990, the figure went up to 64% and in 1995 it was 71%.¹

THE HEALTH HAZARDS OF BEING OVERWEIGHT

Why should we get concerned about being overweight? Being overweight is linked to an increased incidence of accidents, abdominal hernias, arthritis (especially of knees, hips, and lower spine), complications after surgery, gout, high blood fat and cholesterol concentrations, diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), respiratory problems, and varicose veins.



Obesity is associated with a number of chronic diseases: heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney and gallbladder disease, gout,

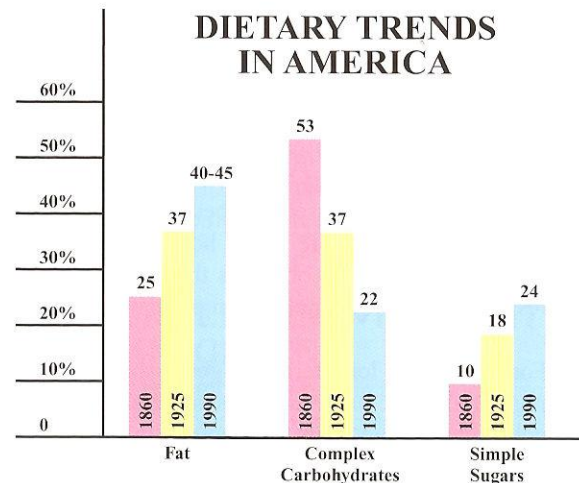
and many cancers. The prevalence of diabetes is three times higher in overweight individuals, and high blood cholesterol levels and hypertension are two and six times higher, respectively, in obese persons compared to those not overweight. The risk of sudden death is several times greater for someone who is obese. For women, obesity predisposes them to complications during pregnancy and childbirth, as well as menstrual abnormalities and cancers of the breast and the uterus.² That's why insurance companies take a good look at height-for-weight tables when it comes to estimating life expectancy.

Excess weight, or obesity, is a physical health hazard but, if corrected in time, some of the risks can be reduced or eliminated.

ARE WE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT WE WEIGH?

Though some things in life are outside our control, this rarely applies to our weight. Is there a genetic link with obesity? If the mother and father are overweight there is an 80% chance that the child will be overweight – but this pattern seems to be more linked to eating habits than heredity. Children of overweight parents adopt habits, eating big meals and foods high in fats and sugars. Once established, these habit patterns are difficult to break, because eating is an enjoyable experience.

There are many reasons why Americans are overweight. The one that is most common is too many calories taken in, and not enough energy burned. The American diet has been changing over the years. The chart “Dietary Trends in America” shows how Americans are eating more fat, which is high in calories, less



complex carbohydrates which should be the largest percentage of our calories, and more simple sugars. Simple sugars are sweet things that although they may be advertised as low-fat they have a lot of sugar calories which are stored in the body, and this leads to obesity. According to the World Health Organization the total percentage of carbohydrates should be about 50-70% of our diet and our fat should be down to 15-30%.³

How do we know if we are overweight or obese? Recommended weight-for-height charts and tables are available but they can be misleading if skeletal structures and muscle density is not considered. Probably shape is a better indicator. Take a look at yourself in the mirror (with clothes off). If there are any bulges – which is generally an excess of fatty tissue – it will be obvious. As people get older, using weight alone as a guide can be deceiving. The reason for this is, as we lose muscle tissue we often replace it with fat – which has more volume of the same weight than muscle. So it's possible to still weigh the same but increase in shape and clothes-size.

SHORT-TERM DIETS

About 40% of all women and 25% of men in the U.S. are on a diet at any given moment. It's estimated that within a few years 90% of them regain most or all of the weight they have lost.⁴ Television and magazine ads frequently offer “quick-fix” solutions to being overweight. However, caution is necessary because such diets are often nutritionally unsound. Though the scales may tell you that you're losing weight, it is generally loss of fluid or lean body tissue (from prolonged fasting), not the fat you want to lose. People on these diets rarely have permanent results because they aren't learning good lifetime habits.

What usually happens is that once the dieter resumes normal eating, weight is put back on and a weight-gain/weight-loss cycle develops that can lead to years of ineffectively struggling with the problem. And in the process, physiological and emotional harm can occur. Some short-term diets are actually harmful and can lead to other health problems, from diabetes to heart disease.

EXERCISE

With all the extra calories we eat, we should be more active; but instead Americans are becoming more physically inactive. We have become a more sedentary society which means less calories are being burned. Excessive TV viewing has been suggested as one cause of the increase in obesity. Adults who viewed television more than 3 hours per day were twice as likely to be obese as those who viewed less than one hour of television per day.⁵



For successful long-term weight management, a regular exercise program is essential, along with a controlled eating plan. Remember the equation, “food energy in must equal physical energy out.” Inactivity is perhaps the greatest contributing factor to obesity. Each one of us has what is called a

basal metabolic rate or BMR. This term refers to the amount of energy we need each day just to keep our body operating in a resting mode. Overweight people have a lower BMR, which means that less energy is needed for this purpose. However, most people continue to eat the same amount of food, or even more, and the excess energy is stored as fat.

When a person has a regular exercise program such as walking, gardening, cycling, or swimming, not only does the activity use more energy, but the BMR is elevated – thus overall more energy is being used. This is a significant contributing factor to weight loss. Unfortunately many think that because they are exercising they can eat what they want, but this makes the problem worse. After eating just one serving of ice cream you would need to jog for about 20 minutes or walk for 1-1/2 hours to use up the energy.

Exercise that is moderate and paced over a reasonable period of time is ideal for breaking down fat stores. But before commencing an exercise program, overweight people should have a complete medical check-up. Initially, overweight/obese people should exercise for only short periods of time; then as their fitness level increases and they lose weight, the time can be extended.

FIRST TWO STEPS

For those who are overweight, one of the first steps to take is to admit that their weight is a problem and that they genuinely want to change their shape to something better. Once this step is taken, old lifestyle and eating practices must be changed and new lifetime behaviors established.

In our time-and-labor-saving modern society we like to have things quick-and-easy, but the quick-and-easy way is not helping us in the long run. For weight loss the second important step is to keep in mind that steady, slow progress is best. Permanent weight loss will result from a gradual program of steady weight loss, like one pound in one or two weeks. Also if we want to reach an ultimate goal, it is helpful to set short-term goals—biweekly or monthly—so that enjoyment of success can come more often and be an encouragement to keep going.

TIPS FOR PERMANENT WEIGHT LOSS AND MANAGEMENT

It is good to remember that people are different, so not all plans will work the same way for every person. Here are some helpful guidelines that deal with practical diet and lifestyle changes.

1. Reduce the Use of Empty and Refined Calories – Sugar is a popular source of empty calories which are stored in the body as fat. Instead of using desserts, fresh fruit is a better alternative. Instead of using syrup for pancakes or waffles, fresh fruit sauce is healthful. Eliminate all soft drinks. One can of soda may contain 10-11 teaspoons of sugar. Use healthful breakfast cereals that are whole grain instead of the refined ones. Whole fruits and vegetables are usually low in calories, while nuts should be used sparingly.



2. No snacks – Eliminating the use of 100 calories per day in snacks will result in 10 pounds loss in a year. The average American snacks 500-600 calories per day.

How to avoid snacking 1) Eat a good breakfast. The body will not be craving something as much mid-morning after a good breakfast. 2) Drink a lot of water between meals. 8-12 full glasses. When the stomach wants a snack, drink a cold glass of water. 3) Do not buy snack foods that will be a temptation. Avoid that section in supermarkets. 4) Store all food out of sight and eat foods in the same place, like at the table, and do not eat in any other room. 5) Eat whole grains and complex carbohydrates which will stick with you longer than refined foods, because of the fiber. 5) Use foods that take a while to chew. Eat an apple instead of apple

sauce or juice, or raw carrots. Beginning a meal with food that requires a lot of chewing helps to fill one up faster. Eating slower and chewing thoroughly helps too.

3. Reduce the Use of Foods High in Cholesterol and Saturated Fat – Stay away from meat which has a high fat content. Visible Fats have 9 calories per gram which is twice as many as are in protein or carbohydrates. Baking more foods will be better than frying or cooking on top of the stove. Gradually increase the use of plant-based main dishes such as beans and tortillas, rice, potatoes, pasta. Milk and dairy products also contain a lot of fat and cholesterol, so switching to non-fat milk or low-fat cottage cheese is better. Many people are experimenting with the alternatives like rice milks and soy milks which are quite healthful and have no cholesterol

4. Two meals a day – Many who switch from three meals a day find that they do better on two meals. The body's metabolism slows down in the evening. As a result the calories eaten in the evening are more often stored as fat rather than burned for energy as are the calories taken early on in the day. A good breakfast and good lunch and nothing in the evening will substantially reduce the calories that would be turned into body weight. If one is hungry at supper-time, cold water may be drunk and a walk will help the temptation. If one is very hungry try some fruit or bread which has lower calories than most evening meals.

6. Exercise – Keep up a daily exercise program, even when the colder weather of winter arrives. Exercising in a group or with a partner will help you maintain your resolve and bring lifetime benefits. If you've previously driven your car from home to work, try walking instead, or park the car farther from work. If travel involves public transport, get off at a station before your destination. Go walking in the evenings with a partner. Think each day how to increase the exercise program without letting it become an obsession.



7. Trust – Friends and family are a good support during this time. They can give encouragement or help keep the “junk food” out of sight.

Cravings for food can be quite intense. Many find help in asking God in prayer to help. God has said, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health,” 3 John 1:2 Losing weight is a slow process and takes a lot of work but our effort and God's blessing are a sure plan toward success.

Though it is hard work changing habits, it is also very rewarding. To be able to put on different clothes is pleasing. Remember that losing weight over a longer period of time is far better than any short-term diets that end in failure and weight return.

It is better to educate the habits and taste buds than to go into a weight-gain/weight-loss cycle, which is far more damaging.

References

- 1 American Medical News, American Medical Association, Apr. 3, 1995
- 2 Winston Craig, Ph.D., R.D., Eating For Good Health, Golden Harvest Books, Eau Claire, Michigan, p. 29
- 3 Report of the Panel on Food and Agriculture, WHO Commission on Health and Environment, Geneva 1992, p. 179
- 4 Univ. of CA., Berkeley Wellness Letter, Vol. 11, Issue 4, Jan. 1995, p. 1
- 5 Winston Craig, Ph.D., R.D., Ibid. p. 31

REVIEW QUESTIONS

T F (True or False)

- ___ ___ 1. Being overweight is a problem only if you are over 65 years old.
- ___ ___ 2. Parents' eating habits have more to do with overweight children than genetics.
- ___ ___ 3. Intake of simple-sugar calories usually does not affect the body weight.

Multiple Choice Questions

Indicate your answer by checking the letter you think is most correct

4. Something that leads to obesity is:
- ___ A. inactivity.
- ___ B. television viewing or being sedentary.
- ___ C. empty calories from fat and refined foods.
- ___ D. all of the above.
5. The first two steps to keep in mind for losing weight are:
- ___ A. slow and steady weight loss, and a high protein diet.
- ___ B. the faster it comes off the better, and daily exercise.
- ___ C. admitting there is a weight problem, and slow, steady weight loss.
- ___ D. none of the above.