The Answer to Weight Loss Is Easy—Doing It Is Hard!

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The rate of obesity and the number of “dieters” are increasing in parallel! Surveys consistently show that most adults are trying to lose or maintain weight. More than 54 million Americans are currently on a diet, yet the prevalence of overweight and obesity continues to increase. If dieting worked, obesity should be decreasing or at least not increasing. It is true that many dieters succeed in taking weight off, but very few—maybe just 5%, but at most 10%—manage to keep the weight off over the long term.

Statistics suggest that about half of the adult population in the United States is overweight (body mass index [BMI = weight/height²] 25–30), and 16% are obese (BMI >30). It is not surprising that so many consumers are searching for the “magic bullet” that will allow them to lose weight quickly and effortlessly. Unfortunately, health professionals also contribute to this phenomenon by constantly warning the public and their patients about the perils of being overweight. And herein lies the quandary—how to solve the problem of increasing obesity and its related health risks without making the problem worse.

Many Professionals Claim to Have the Solution to Weight Loss

There seem to be many “authorities” out there who have the answer—buy their book, buy their product, come to their program, and you will lose weight. A search of Amazon.com using the words “weight loss” revealed 1,214 matches with 58% published after 1999 and 85% since 1997. Many of the 20 best sellers at Amazon.com promote some form of carbohydrate restriction—Dr. Atkins’ New Diet Revolution, The Carbohydrate Addict’s Diet, Protein Power, Lauri’s Low-Carb Cookbook. So people do buy their books and products and attend their programs and do lose weight.

But although there appear to be easy solutions to the weight-loss problem, these solutions tend to be, at best, temporary. Even the “gold standard” behavioral weight-loss programs—those involving 16–24 treatment sessions over 6 months including self-monitoring, low-fat diet, and exercise—consider an average weight loss of 18–20 lb a success, but also report that participants retain only 60% of their initial weight loss 1 year after treatment. Another study reported the average duration of weight-loss programs to be 18 weeks, with moderately obese individuals losing 10% of their body weight. However, at 1 year, 34% had regained the lost weight, and at 3- to 5-year follow-up, there was a gradual return to baseline weight.

To determine what is required to maintain weight loss, a national registry searched nationwide and found a small number (in comparison to the number of people who diet) of successful weight losers. In a descriptive study of 784 participants, the investigators reported that participants who lost an average of 66 lb (30 kg) and kept off at least 30 lb (13.6 kg) for an average of 5.5 years expend an average of 2,800 kcal per week through physical activity or an average of 1.5 h of exercise daily and eat less than 1,400–1,500 kcal with ~20% of their calories from fat. In other words, their life is devoted to weight loss! But we all want an easier answer, so the parade of quick fixes continues.

Given the beneficial effects of weight-loss treatments on medical conditions such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, reputable researchers continue to search for innovative ways to improve treatment outcomes. As researchers continue to search for solutions to the problem of weight regain after weight loss, other medical professionals “buy into” the claims made for the high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets, and without any research documenting the long-term effectiveness of this solution, they recommend the latest book to their patients.

The Latest Solution: High-Protein, Low-Carbohydrate Diets

The current diet fad promises results with a high-protein, low-carbohydrate