

To lose weight, eat less, exercise more

NEWARK, Del. — The bathing suit season will soon be here and many folks are trying to trim down. In an effort to lose weight, people try all sorts of fad diets, from lollipops to grapefruit. Besides being ineffective, these diets can be downright dangerous.

Peggy Policastro, a student dietitian with the University of Delaware's Coordinated Undergraduate Program in Dietetics, says that to lose weight you must eat less and exercise more. We lose weight when our bodies burn more calories than we consume. For weight reduction to occur, you can either eat less food or exercise regularly—preferably both.

Following popular reducing plans instead of this simple approach can soon lead to serious health problems or compound existing ones, Policastro says.

A good example is the low carbohydrate diet which is the basis of the Scarsdale, Drinking Man's, Calories-Don't-Count, Air Force and similar diets. These plans cut carbohydrate consumption to 60 grams a day or less and allow dieters to eat all the protein or fat foods they want.

According to Policastro, there are two things wrong with this diet. First, the high fat content may contribute to atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). And second, its low carbohydrate content could lead to ketosis. This is a condition in which the body produces ketones for energy instead of using available glucose from carbohydrate sources. The outcome of ketosis is nausea and suppressed appetite.

A diet low in carbohydrates also causes the body to lose excess amounts of salt. Since water follows salt, much of the weight loss with this type of diet is water that can easily be regained.

Other popular diets (such as the grapefruit diet) promote one particular food to aid in the "burning up" of another food. However, says Policastro, no food has been shown to accomplish this great feat. These diets are based

on a misunderstanding of the way food affects the digestive process. Only a few kilocalories are used to fuel digestion—not enough to burn the calories consumed.

Then there are the folks who think they must stop eating entirely to lose weight. These people survive on non-caloric liquids. Besides the physical hazards of fasting, weight loss of this sort is only as permanent as the fasting.

Once the person begins to eat again, the lost weight will quickly return.

Nutritional soundness is essential in any diet. When evaluating one, ask yourself these questions. Is weight loss averaged at one to two pounds a week? Does the diet use behavior modification you can live with? Does it fit your current lifestyle? And does it take into account your sex, body weight

and the amount of activity you get? Nutritionally sound diets are probably those with mostly yesses to these questions, Policastro says.

So what does she recommend, if you want to get in trim for the bathing suit season? Eat three well-balanced meals, but give up that slice of cake and walk an extra mile and you'll be off to a safe, healthy and easy weight loss program!

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