

Obsession with the Number on the Scale

Do we need a change of focus?

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Through my work in the health and fitness industry over the past 10 years I have come across many people who are desperately trying to lose weight and keep it off. At the same time I have watched how society has become increasingly good at coming up with quick fix solutions to weight loss at the expense of the people who are searching for the answer. Diet pills, meal replacement shakes, and various different diet programs all promising fast weight loss. Unfortunately, quick fix solutions do not help a person make lifestyle changes that can be maintained for a lifetime. Most people do not maintain the weight loss after they stop dieting and return to old habits. People are often willing to make drastic changes to their diet or exercise habits in order to decrease that number on the scale, but drastic changes are usually not sustainable. There are no magic quick fix solutions, instead, we must figure out a way to make sustainable lifestyle changes and be prepared that this can often take some time to accomplish. It's not about how fast we can lose weight, or being skinny for that matter, it's how we live our lives, the choices that we make every day when it comes to our health and wellbeing.

For most, the number on the scale is often the preferred way to determine success of a person's efforts to eat healthier and exercise. However, focusing on weight loss alone may actually discourage ones efforts and prevent them from making positive lifestyle changes. Being more active and eating healthier have proven benefits and should be viewed as successes in themselves, yet individuals often focus only on the short term weight goal rather than the long term health benefits. There is a long list of success factors, other than a decrease in the number on the scale that need to be considered when a person starts on the journey of weight loss. For example, increased energy levels, better sleep, and reduced inches around the waist to mention a few.

Being more active, choosing to eat a balanced healthy diet, and trying to find ways to reduce stress in your life, are all important for long term sustainable weight management. The key is to take one step at a time, make short term goals in order to reach long term goals. You can't change everything overnight; it takes time to change old habits or to add new habits. A simple thing like walking every day can help increase your fitness level, lower blood pressure and heart rate (making the heart more efficient), lower cholesterol, reduce total body fat as well as improve glucose tolerance, prevent cardio vascular disease, diabetes, and some cancers.

Improving your overall fitness also leads to improved bone and joint health and improved posture. None of these benefits will appear as a number on the scale. Simply start by setting a goal of walking 3 times per week for 10-15 minutes and once that becomes a habit, increase the time and frequency.

Focus on the positives of a healthy lifestyle and think of all the benefits you gain. Eating healthier for the sake of giving your body nourishment is more sustainable than eating healthier for the sake of weight loss. Making a choice of having whole grain toast with almond butter instead of a donut is a simple example of how you can make a healthier choice. Focus on the fact that the whole grains and almond butter will feed your body vitamins, minerals, protein and fiber, versus the empty calorie packed donut that have zero nutritional value. Avoid focusing on the negative, "The scale tells me I didn't lose as much weight as I wanted" and focus on the positive "I have now added exercise to my life" or "I have reduced the amount of fat and unhealthy foods I am eating". Every little step you take towards living healthier matters, regardless of the number on the scale. Try not to get discouraged by societal body image norms as they are unrealistic and often even unhealthy.

If you focus on taking care of your body regardless of how much you weigh, you will find it more rewarding and easier to make healthy lifestyle changes.

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