

Holistic Nutrition

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Elizabeth Montgomery

I'm 29 years old and for as long as I can remember I've struggled with my weight. I've tried almost every diet there is but I never seem to be able to keep the weight off. I work in an office where biscuits and coffee are available all day. Sometimes, I give in to temptation because I always feel like I'll gain weight no matter what I do. I often eat only salads for lunch, and I love pasta, but I try to only have it a few times each week.

I also try to keep fizzy drinks down to a minimum. My partner keeps on suggesting that I join a gym to lose weight. Any suggestions would be helpful.



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Please know that you are not alone with your weight issues as excess weight gain is something that most of us experience at some point in our lives. What I feel is important for you to understand is that long-term healthy weight loss is actually more of a lifestyle choice – rather than a short-term dietary fad. In fact, research has shown that only a maximum of 20% of all people who embark on a weight-loss diet are actually able to maintain the weight loss one year later. So what is this telling us? That it's very easy to slip back into old habits and put the weight back on! So perhaps before you try to lose weight again, you might consider taking a thorough and honest assessment of the diet and lifestyle choices you are currently making. For example, you might try keeping a detailed food journal for a week. This can help you to discover what triggers your desire for certain types of food and drinks, and the times at which you choose to ingest them.

I also believe that a shift in perspective on how you view food is required for successful weight loss. This is because in our Western culture, for most people, food is only seen as something that provides comfort and pleasure. The danger with comfort eating is that things can often spiral out of control and lead to more food cravings (sugary foods, fast foods, coffee, beer, etc.). A very good starting point is learning how to distinguish between comfort eating and eating for physical health. When it comes to weight loss, it's helpful to view food as a way to nourish and fuel your system. In other words, learning how to eat-to-live in a more health conscious manner is key – rather than living to eat.

Let's take a look at some of the main reasons for excess weight gain:

COMMON WEIGHT GAIN FACTORS:

- 1) Diet: processed foods, sugar, fizzy drinks, fried foods
- 2) Exercise: lack of daily exercise, sedentary lifestyle
- 3) Hormone imbalances: menopause, hypothyroidism

- 4) Body type: different body types store weight in different places
- 5) Addictions: emotional eating patterns, eating disorders, self-sabotage
- 6) Chronic stress: high cortisol levels lead to weight gain around the middle
- 7) Age: slower metabolism in later years

As you can see there are multiple factors involved in excess weight gain. So what can be done about them? Most health experts agree that when it comes to losing weight the first and foremost area to address is diet. But, although there are many popular weight-loss approaches to choose from (for example the Paleo, 5:2 or Dukan diets), it's always important to take potential health issues into consideration. For example, a diet of no carbs and high animal protein might initially prove to be effective, but it might also lead to greater fat storage, internal acidity and high cholesterol levels in the long term. Therefore, a balanced diet, wisely chosen according to your individual needs is required for long-term success. Luckily, a healthful weight-loss programme may well be within reach as long as your goals are clear and your desire to achieve them is in place.

HOLISTIC DIETARY AND LIFESTYLE TIPS FOR WEIGHT LOSS: Embrace healthy fats

Recent research has shown that fat is no longer the culprit when it comes to excess weight. In fact, including healthy fats in the diet can prompt the body to burn stored fat as fuel. Healthy fats also help stabilise blood sugar, keep us satiated for longer periods, and play a critical role in maintaining healthy cellular function. Some examples of healthy dietary fats to include in the diet are: avocados, olives, fish oil, nuts and coconut oil. On the other hand, unhealthy fats often lead to weight gain and can cause a host of health issues. Unhealthy fats to avoid include: trans fats (i.e. margarine, commercial cakes and chocolate), fried foods, and processed and excess land animal fats (e.g. bacon and lard).

Ditch the sugar

Sugar is the number one enemy when it comes to weight loss and is found virtually everywhere. The body recognises sugar in all forms as energy and stores it in the fat cells for later use. Going cold turkey might not be the answer so try transitioning with low glycaemic fruits (blueberries, raspberries,

strawberries, etc.) to curb daily sugar cravings. Avoid sugary drinks which also pile on the pounds such as fizzy drinks, alcohol and fruit juices.

Mind the carbs

Carbs are an important part of a healthy diet but can be another culprit when it comes to weight gain. It's important to understand the difference between the good, or complex, carbs and the bad, or simple, carbs. The simple carbs are the ones to avoid and include: white breads, white pasta, pastries and white potatoes (technically a complex carb but acts like a simple carb in the body). Examples of complex carbs to include: wholegrain brown rice, quinoa and sweet potatoes (best eaten with the skin on).

Get some sleep

Many people find themselves burning the candle at both ends. Lack of sleep is a common culprit in weight gain because our sleep patterns have a big impact on our hormone levels. Research has shown that the biggest spike in fat-burning hormones occurs during deep sleep. Aim to sleep 7–8 hours a night and go to bed before midnight when possible.

Rev your engine

Exercise is key when it comes to losing weight. We've all heard the benefits of aerobic exercise to help burn off calories, but strength training also has weight-loss benefits. This is because by increasing your muscle mass, you also increase your calorie-burning mechanism. This means your body will burn more calories when resting. So it's a good idea to alternate aerobic activity (power walking, cycling, etc.) with strength training (light weights, squats, push-ups). Aim to build up to exercising 3–5 days per week and see the results.

Chakra balance

To maintain a healthy weight, the sacral, or second chakra, needs to be in balance, as this is the seat of your emotions, sensuality and inner child. It's possible to get trapped into pleasure-seeking mode with food when there are unresolved emotions from past traumas. Therefore, working to resolve past issues that need healing is important to bring about lasting change. Foods that assist in balancing this energy centre are orange in colour and include carrots, sweet potatoes, orange peppers and pumpkins. There is also an affirmation you can use to help with this: I lovingly nourish myself with the right foods. I am happy and free.

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