

Health Promotion Practitioner

Practical solutions for health enhancement programming

Your BIG Chance in Health Promotion

The news about overweight and obesity couldn't be more discouraging. As every health promoter knows, our population's weight has ballooned in the last 3 decades — going from less than half the population to 65%... with no end in sight.

Up to this point we've consistently lost the battle of the bulge to societal trends:

- Cheap, large-portion convenience foods — particularly high-sugar/high-fat fast food and prepackaged items — with increasingly skillful marketing
- Suburban spread — with more time spent in cars and less time walking
- Dual-income households — resulting in more eating out as well as less time to prepare and share family meals
- Unlimited sedentary entertainment — contributing to a generation of kids at risk for adult-onset diabetes
- Moving away from personal responsibility — for our everyday choices and health.

What's a Health Promoter to Do?

For as long as health promotion has existed, there have been weight control programs with largely poor long-term results. Anyone who believes we can roll back the stats to the mid-'70s — when the trends listed above began contributing to a lifestyle that produced our collective out-of-control girth growth — is living on another planet. It won't happen.

Once you accept that most of your population is not going to achieve an “ideal body weight,” or BMI under 30, or a specific waist/hip ratio, you can set about doing what you can. And the #1 message to convey is personal responsibility.

Most adults are overweight because of the choices they make as adults. Yes, childhood obesity makes it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for some to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Genetics also can be a huge barrier. But that doesn't dismiss the individual from doing what they can do to live healthier.

Typical Results

If you look in the lower part of your TV screen during weight loss product infomercials you'll see this disclaimer in small, faint letters with each testimonial: Results not typical. The FTC truth-in-advertising regulations require it. What that means is, out of the thousands who tried this approach, the producers picked a handful to show you because they achieved dramatic results.

Health professionals who live in the real world know these products don't work for the vast majority. It's likely the “success” was due more to eating fewer calories and burning more calories than the supplement or contraption.

But typical results you can point to with complete confidence do exist — in data maintained by the

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National Weight Control Registry. Individuals in the registry have lost 30 pounds and kept it off for at least 5 years.

These achievements go largely unnoticed by the media and the general population because they resulted from taking personal responsibility for health and making very difficult lifestyle changes:

- 60 minutes or more of physical activity a day
- Low-calorie eating each day (1400 women, 1700 men) and consistent monitoring of food intake
- Low-fat choices (<25% from fat, <10% from saturated fat and transfat)
- Eating breakfast daily
- Consistent eating pattern across weekdays and weekends
- Regular weighing.

Soft-Pedaling Sells

Unfortunately, many health promoters have fallen into the trap of “little changes here and there add up” —

Little changes don't add up. They simply make it easier to slide back to old habits, because they're so close to them to begin with.

believing you somehow can magically achieve health by parking a little farther away from the ice cream store entrance. The US government has further propagated this notion with its SmallSteps.gov, which does a disservice to the individual's and the nation's health. Little changes don't add up. They simply make it easier to slide back to old habits, because they're so close to them to begin with.

If you really want to do something dramatic and potentially long-lasting for those you serve, start giving them the straight story: to lose weight and keep it off, you have to exercise every day and eat less (in some cases, a lot less). For background, visit www.nwcr.ws; you'll find details on how the data was collected as well as studies analyzing the results. 🇺🇸



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