

Health Promotion Practitioner

Practical solutions for health enhancement programming

It's March: Do You Know Where Your Weight Loss Participants Are?

Every January the airwaves and Internet are flooded with new weight loss come-ons — *I lost 30 pounds in 8 weeks! I lost 41 pounds in 12 weeks! I lost...* The claims are accompanied by dramatic before and after photos showing that, indeed, the testimonials must be true.

You'll also notice, at the lower part of the screen in tiny, semi-transparent letters, the words "Results not typical." It's a hedge by product sponsors, much like the investment firm disclaimer "Past performance is no guarantee of future results." They're covering themselves in the event your experience isn't so good.

By March, consumers who are going to jump on the weight loss bandwagon have — many plunking down hundreds, even thousands of dollars in search of the scale's Holy Grail. For some, the investment produces immediate rewards; the pounds drop off, the numbers on the scale go down, and — for the first 4-8 weeks on the program — life is good.

The truth is, losing weight is easy. Thousands do it every year — through commercial weight loss products, prepackaged meals, low-carb, low-sugar, or low-fat plans, supplements, drugs, hypnosis, starvation, or the half dozen different fad diets that pop up every few years.

But inevitably, somewhere between March and May, motivation fades and the weight stops coming off. Within just a few weeks, the last 3 pounds lost have been regained; within a year, 9 of 10 people have gained back all the weight they lost... or more. And the cycle repeats itself.

Why? Why do you lose weight only to regain it? Is it a lack of effort? Will power? Character? A chemical imbalance? No, no, no, and no. The reason people regain weight they've lost time and again has nothing to do with any mental or physical weakness. More than 90% of people who go on a "diet" to lose weight regain it in a year or less because nothing has really changed. And the reason nothing changes is the diet (or program, or product) didn't make any sense from the start, so we revert to habits that are at least familiar.

No one is going to restrict carbs for the rest of their life or continue eating prepackaged diets, drinking meals from a can, taking expensive supplements, or doing any of the other unnatural, unrealistic, and often unhealthy practices most of these plans offer. Even the programs that promote a healthful approach to eating can be extremely challenging to maintain because they require endless calorie-counting, fat gram-tabulating, weighing and measuring, or record-keeping. And many of these have developed packaged food lines as well, leading consumers to believe that "special" foods are needed to lose weight.

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It's not working. According to the North American Association for the Study of Obesity (www.naaso.org), more than 64% of US adults are overweight or obese — a 14% increase in just 20 years.

Does *anything* work? Do your participants have any hope of losing weight and keeping it off? Can they get on a path that leads to healthy weight and stay on it?

If you look at the trends, you'd have to say no. Year in and year out, we're exercising less and eating too many refined carbs, particularly sugar. Meanwhile, our politicians and nonprofit watchdog nannies like CSPI keep blaming everyone but the individual — who is really the only one who can do anything about it.

Most of the overweight population continues to be fed the notion that little changes here and there will add up to a healthy weight, when there is zero evidence that little changes work. None.

The Truth About Weight and Keeping it Off

Think about clients you've worked with over the years who've lost a significant amount of weight and kept it off; *all* of them made big changes. They went from no exercise to 30-60 minutes daily, from a pantry full of junk

food to a full vegetable drawer in the fridge, from regular late-night noshing to no after-dinner eating, from a daily can of soda (or 2 or 3) to none, from weighing themselves once a year to checking their weight every day.

It's more than just semantics. If you interview people who have accomplished long-term weight loss (3 years or more), *they* don't describe what they've done as little changes. And they don't say it was easy. Reversing years or decades of ingrained habits takes a Herculean effort, not just parking an extra hundred yards from the entrance to the store.

Regardless of what weight loss tools you offer your population, maybe the most important thing you can do is convey the message that losing weight and keeping it off take a huge effort. That changing the habits causing overweight will require extreme vigilance. That little changes are too close to old habits... taking responsibility for their weight and their health means completely breaking out of their old habits.

It's not easy counsel to give or receive, but it's the truth. Understanding the facts will give your participants a real shot at finally making the big changes needed to achieve and sustain a healthy weight. 🇺🇸



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