

This is Dr. Daniel Weiss from Your Diabetes Endocrine Nutrition Group. My topic today: four common weight loss myths. Of course, losing weight and keeping it off is very difficult. And there are no very effective and easy ways to lose weight and keep that weight off, so overweight persons spend billions of dollars yearly on useless products or fads. And others make lots of money selling these books, devices or pills that claim to help you lose weight with little effort and/or little change in how you eat. If any of these approaches were proven effective, there would be many fewer overweight people. But more than 2/3 of adults in the U.S. are overweight or obese.

First, a few basic principles: In order to lose weight every animal, human or otherwise, must burn up more energy than is taken in as food. Energy is measured in units known as calories. Your metabolic rate determines how many calories you burn up. Many complex factors affect this metabolic rate. More calories can be burned up by being more active. But it is very difficult to lose weight simply by increasing activity a little. In order to lose weight, energy intake, that is calories from food, must be reduced.

Now let's turn to 4 commonly held mistaken beliefs that I often hear expressed by my patients. First that one must drink water both to lose weight and for health, specifically 8 glasses a day. Not only is this

consumption of water unnecessary for weight loss, it is not needed for health otherwise. Only those with a tendency toward kidney stones should force themselves to drink this amount of water. We can usually rely on our thirst to tell us to drink. And forcing this amount of fluids, in some persons can lead to a serious imbalance of minerals in the blood.

Well you might say that if I drink water before a meal I will feel full and eat less. Many people including doctors still believe this. A study was carefully done to examine food intake in overweight persons who did or did not drink water before meals. No difference in calorie intake or weight was seen.

Now drinking water may lead you to spend more time in the bathroom and less in the kitchen; in theory that might cause weight loss. But this too has never been shown. Keep in mind also that water does not increase your metabolic rate. That is, it does not increase the calories you burn. So drinking lots of water simply is not needed nor is it helpful for weight loss.

A second common mistaken belief is that a meal should never be skipped and that you must eat as if following the clock, even when you are not hungry. This is sheer nonsense with no scientific backing whatsoever. This approach asks us to ignore our own internal signals and eat following some external cue like a clock. I find that those who force themselves to eat

3 meals a day when they feel they do best with two meals a day, seldom lose and often gain weight. To my patients, I stress that if you are not hungry, do not eat.

A third common misconception is that eating before bedtime is especially bad for weight control. The time of day you take in those extra unneeded calories is not important. Why would going to sleep after you eat make any difference? Remember weight control is all about energy balance; are you taking in more calories than you burn up? That's what's important not when you eat (or drink) those extra calories.

Last and perhaps the most commonly held misconception is that if you cannot exercise, you cannot lose weight. It turns out that many studies of overweight persons have shown excellent weight loss even without exercise. And I have seen this in my practice with patients. On the other hand, exercise alone is usually not enough to promote weight loss. Consuming fewer calories is required.

Exercise is not necessary to lose weight but it seems to be important for three reasons. First, exercise seems to help keep off the weight that you lose, that is it helps prevent weight regain. Second, while cutting down on calories, performing modest regular exercise, like walking, makes for less loss of muscle and more loss of fat while you are losing weight. You want to

keep all the muscle you have because muscle helps to increase the metabolic rate; muscle burns up more calories per pound than does a pound of fat.

Lastly, some people find that exercise helps with controlling their appetite.

So what is proven is what you probably already know: eat and drink fewer calories, and try to exercise. In the next update, I will talk more about weight loss for those with diabetes.

My goal in these postings is to bring you important new scientific findings about nutrition, diabetes and other medical issues. I want to remind you that scientific knowledge is always changing. What is known today may be seen from a different perspective or may be changed tomorrow. I will share with you my understanding of current research related to day to day decisions about your health.

Take care.

References:

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