



## **Weight Loss: The Best Recipe**

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I can estimate that more than half of the patients that walk into my office have concerns that could be resolved if they knew how to control their weight in a healthy way. A frightening statistic released in 2011 from Statistics Canada stated that 61% of Canadians are either overweight or obese<sup>1</sup>. Despite Public Health efforts to educate our population about healthy eating and exercise, this percentage has continued to increase over the last 10 years. It is no surprise that obesity has been linked with many chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, arthritis, and some forms of cancer<sup>2</sup>.

In medical school, physicians memorize all the statistics about weight issues in our country and learn that carrying extra weight can lead to a myriad of health conditions. These complications of being overweight cost the Canadian Health Care system an estimated *four billion dollars* annually. This number is staggering! It is astounding to know just how much of our tax dollars are paying for the health costs of a condition that is 100% preventable if addressed properly.

Unfortunately, few physicians receive further education to provide their patients with *effective, healthy, and long-lasting* strategies to lose weight and promote wellness. As a result, the multi-billion dollar weight loss industry continues to profit off many Canadian's desperate attempts to shed extra pounds.

So where does that leave Canadian's who want to lose weight? Do they continue to search on the Internet for the next weight loss product or watch Dr. Oz to hear what he might suggest? Well the truth of the matter is, it does not take a pill to gain weight so it will not take a pill to reverse the process either. The same rings true with fad dieting. Quite frequently the weight lost during dieting is gained back just as quickly. In contrast to popular belief, dieting actually *lowers* the metabolic rate and, when the diet is over, the body burns fewer calories than it did prior. This means the weight returns, and then some. This occurs over



and over again as the pounds lost are not attributed to permanent changes in diet and lifestyle habits.

In actual fact, reducing daily calories, skipping meals and fasting all cause the body to go into “starvation” mode, much like a hibernating animal. Remember that a bear that sleeps through winter does not eat, but relies on its fat stores for fuel during the grueling winter months. In the same fashion, the human body stores fat (and often in unflattering areas), resulting in a net increase in body fat percentage. These practices actually work against the intended goal of feeling and looking healthier.

When asked about their personal weight management journey, many of my patients recount several attempts to lose weight on their own with fad diets, short stints of exercise, calorie counting, self-prescribed supplements, and the list goes on. People come in to my office frustrated, discouraged, and quite sadly, embarrassed. This is amplified by a harmful stigma in our society that people who are overweight are lazy, unmotivated, and unhealthy. Truth be told, I could say that about several of my patients who are “thin”. These assumptions are often incorrect and inaccurate.

In fact, there are many physiological imbalances that can contribute to the struggle of obesity. Low thyroid or adrenal gland function, food sensitivities, hormonal imbalances, chronic stress, nutrient deficiencies, medications, and chronic inflammation can all contribute to weight gain. These elements should be ruled out before committing to a weight loss program. Otherwise, one might feel like they are constantly fighting a losing battle.

Based on my clinical experience, I believe that an effective recipe for weight loss must include the following three steps. First, with the guidance of a physician, physiological factors that are impeding weight loss must be addressed. For example, a blood test called TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone) can let you know how effective your thyroid is functioning. But it does not give the whole picture. A full thyroid panel can let you know how your brain and thyroid are communicating, and if your body is getting enough active thyroid hormone to keep a healthy



metabolic rate. If you have normal levels of TSH, your test results will be from 0.3-2.5  $\mu\text{IU}/\text{mL}^3$ . A score between 2.5  $\mu\text{IU}/\text{mL}$  and 4  $\mu\text{IU}/\text{mL}$  indicates that you are at risk for hypothyroidism and require close monitoring.

Secondly, lifestyle factors that are non-conducive to weight loss must be identified and modified. For example, you may need to adopt stress reduction strategies like getting to bed earlier, or walking away from a toxic relationship.

Lastly, each individual must show commitment and motivation to make life-long changes. The reality is, there is no quick fix. Diet and lifestyle habits need to be addressed and improved upon to maintain a healthy weight. Slow and steady weight loss is easier on your body and less difficult to maintain.

It is a sad state of health in Canada with such a high percentage of the population suffering from a destructive, but preventable, illness. Even more disappointing is that many health care providers are often ill equipped to effectively guide their patients in the right direction. Fortunately, there are medical professionals that able to help you determine what might be holding you back from your health and wellness goals. It is important to work with a practitioner that walks the path of wellness, and one that utilizes a holistic approach. At the end of the day, it is balance of physiology and lifestyle, combined with motivation and support, that is the best formula for effective and sustainable weight management.

## References:

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