



Realistic Weight Loss

by the American Institute for Cancer Research

Some dieters may be setting unrealistic weight loss goals. Health experts emphasize that even a modest 5 to 10 percent weight loss brings significant benefits. However, many overweight dieters consider such a small loss worse than disappointing.

For example, obese women enrolled in a recent weight-loss study described a possible loss of 55 pounds as “acceptable” and a 37-pound loss as “disappointing.” After almost a year in a well-rounded treatment program, the weight loss for these women averaged 35 pounds – less than what they considered a disappointing outcome, but enough to bring numerous health benefits according to medical experts. One wonders if these women will keep their new habits or return to old ones out of frustration.

Lasting Habits Start Slowly

The more weight a person wants to lose, the greater the number or degree of changes needed in one’s diet or activity levels to reach the goal. For this reason, many experts discourage dieters from aiming for too great a weight loss. For those who are overweight, the National Institutes of Health recommends a loss of just 10 percent of current weight over a six-month period.

Although diet books sometimes call for dramatic changes in eating, another new study supports the advice to spread changes in eating habits out over a period of years.

In the study, researchers interviewed adults over age 50 who had reduced the fat in their diets during a period of 5 to 43 years. Through in-depth reporting techniques, researchers found that participants had gone from an average of about 44 percent of daily calories from fat to about 26 percent. The participants had achieved this by making changes in an average of 16 separate “clusters” of specific foods.

Choose What You Can Do

People who successfully adopt lowfat diets pick the specific strategies that work for them. To find the changes that will work for you, consider the following four questions:

1. What lower-fat foods could you substitute for those higher in fat, such as changing the type of milk you drink?
2. What foods can you modify, like removing the skin from chicken?
3. What foods can you replace, for example, eating more vegetables and fruits instead of large meat portions?
4. What foods can you comfortably exclude?

As you try to lose weight, don't lose sight of the goal. A diet's fat content alone does not guarantee good nutrition. Fat-free cookies, fruits and vegetables are not nutritionally equal. To reach the goal of good health, aim for an eating approach that resembles the "New American Plate" program from the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR). Fill your plate primarily with vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans, which are both low in fat and contain a wide variety of nutrients and phytochemicals that help prevent cancer and promote overall wellness.

To order a free copy of *The New American Plate*, which contains healthy recipes, call AICR at 1-800-843-8114, ext. 10, or visit www.aicr.org.

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