



Losing Weight: Start By Counting Calories

Writing for the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, Linda Bren says Americans are getting fatter. We're putting on the pounds at an alarmingly rapid rate. And we're sacrificing our health for the sake of super-sized portions, biggie drinks, and two-for-one value meals. More than 60 percent of U.S. adults are overweight, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). And about 15 percent of children and adolescents ages 6 to 19 are overweight.

Poor diet and physical inactivity account for more than 400,000 premature deaths each year in the United States, second only to deaths related to smoking. People who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, gallbladder disease, and joint pain caused by excess uric acid (gout). Excess weight can also cause interrupted breathing during sleep (sleep apnea) and wearing away of the joints (osteoarthritis). Carrying extra weight means carry-

ing an extra risk for certain types of cancer, including endometrial, breast, prostate, and colon cancer.

But there is hope for those of us who are overweight. We can take small achievable steps to improve our health and reverse the obesity epidemic. This message is the cornerstone of a national education campaign announced in March 2004 by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Changing Eating Habits

As Bren explains, dieting may conjure up visions of eating little but lettuce and sprouts—but you can enjoy all foods as part of a healthy diet as long as you don't overdo it. The No. 1 reason for obesity is this: we simply eat way too much. To be successful at losing weight, we need to change our lifestyle—not just go on a diet. This requires cutting back on the number of calories consumed by eating smaller amounts of foods and choosing foods lower in calories.

Lose Weight Without Losing Money

Have you been tempted by ads for products promising quick, easy weight loss? Let's face it. As many of us have experienced, healthy, long-term weight loss is neither quick nor easy. And numerous products—whether a fad diet, "miracle" drink, or newfangled machine—usually don't deliver on their promises. When all is said and done, the best way to lose weight is to eat fewer calories and increase your physical activity. Experts suggest aiming for a weight loss goal of about a pound a week.

This issue of Dollars & Sense provides common-sense tips on how to lose weight gradually, effectively, and in a healthy manner. You'll also find heads-up information on how to recognize and avoid false claims of diet products so you can direct more of your money toward climbing out of debt and reaching your financial goals. ■

It also means being more physically active.

Consider limiting portion sizes, especially of foods high in calories, such as cookies, cakes and other

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sweets; fried foods, like fried chicken and French fries; and fats, oils, and spreads. Reducing dietary fat alone—without reducing calories—will not produce weight loss, according to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's guidelines on treating overweight and obesity in adults.

Use the Food Guide Pyramid developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Health and Human Services to help you choose a healthful assortment of foods. Include bright-colored (red, yellow, green, and orange) vegetables and fruits, grains (especially whole grains), low-fat or fat-free milk, and fish, lean meat, poultry, or beans. Choose foods naturally high in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables, legumes (such as beans and lentils), and whole grains. The high fiber content of many of these foods may help you to feel full with fewer calories. To be sure that a food is whole grain, check the ingredient list on the food label—the first ingredient should be whole wheat or whole grain.

All calorie sources are not created equal. Carbohydrate and protein have about four calories per gram, but all fats, including oils like olive and canola oil, have more than twice that amount (nine calories per gram).

Flee from the Fat

Keep your intake of saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol as low as possible. All of these fats raise LDL (or “bad cholesterol”), which increases your risk for coronary heart disease. Foods high in saturated fats include high-fat dairy products (like cheese, whole milk, cream, butter, and regular ice cream), fatty fresh and processed meats, the skin and fat of poultry, lard, palm oil, and coconut oil. Trans fat can often be

found in processed foods made with partially hydrogenated vegetable oils such as vegetable shortenings, some margarines (for example, stick margarines that are hard), crackers, cookies, candies, snack foods, fried foods and baked goods.

Moderate Alcohol and Sugar

If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation (no more than one drink a day for women, and no more than two drinks a day for men). Alcoholic beverages supply calories but few nutrients. For example, a 12-ounce regular beer contains about 150 calories, a five-ounce glass of wine about 100 calories, and 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits about 100 calories.

Limit your use of beverages and foods that are high in added sugars—those added to foods in processing or preparation, not the naturally occurring sugars in foods such as fruit or milk. Foods high in added sugars

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provide calories, but may have few of the other beneficial nutrients such as fiber, vitamins, and minerals that your body needs. A food high in added sugars will list a sugar as the first or second ingredient on the ingredient list. Some examples of added sugars are corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, maltose, dextrose, honey, fruit juice concentrates, and maple syrup. In the United States, foods high in added sugars include non-diet soft drinks, sweetened beverages, including teas, fruit drinks, sweets and candies, cakes and cookies. ■

Weight Loss Tips for Eating Out

- Ask for nutrition information (for example, calories, saturated fat, and sodium) before you order when eating out.
- Choose foods that are steamed, broiled, baked, roasted, poached, or stir-fried, but not deep-fat fried.
- Share food, such as a main dish or dessert, with your dining partner.
- Take part of the food home with you and refrigerate immediately. You may want to ask for a take-home container when the meal arrives. Spoon half the meal into it, so you're more likely to eat only what's left on your plate.
- Request your meal to be served without gravy, sauces, butter or margarine.
- Ask for salad dressing on the side, and use only small amounts of full-fat dressings.

Portion Distortion—Keep an Eye on Portion Size

As explained by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, food portions served up at restaurants have gotten larger. Some fast food portions are called “super size,” while others have simply grown in size and provide enough food for at least two people.

to mean 6 to 11 portions with no regard to size. It is not 6 to 11 portions where one portion could mean a large bowl of pasta rather than half a cup. Keep an eye on portion size to see how your portions compare with the recommended servings.



With this growth have come increases in waistlines and body weight.

A “portion” can be thought of as the amount of a specific food you choose to eat for dinner, snack, or other eating occasion. Portions, of course can be bigger or smaller than the recommended food servings. A “serving” is a unit of measure used to describe the amount of food recommended from each food group. It is the amount of food listed on the Nutrition Facts panel on packaged food or the amount of food recommended in the Food Guide Pyramid and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

For example, 6 to 11 servings of whole grains are recommended daily. A recommended serving of whole grains would be one slice of bread or half a cup of rice or pasta. People often confuse the recommendation

Portion Distortion Quiz

Take this quick quiz to see how today’s food portions compare to the portions available 20 years ago. You’ll find answers at the end of the quiz, and they may surprise you.

1. Bagel—A bagel 20 years ago was three inches in diameter and had 140 calories. How many calories do you think are in today’s bagel?

___ 350 ___ 250 ___ 150

2. Cheeseburger—A cheeseburger 20 years ago had 333 calories. How many calories do you think are in today’s cheeseburger?

___ 590 ___ 620 ___ 700

3. Spaghetti and Meatballs—A portion of spaghetti and meatballs

20 years ago had 500 calories. How many calories do you think are in today’s portion of spaghetti and meatballs?

___ 1,025 ___ 600 ___ 800

4. Soda—A 6.5-ounce portion of soda had 85 calories. How many calories do you think are in today’s portion?

___ 250 ___ 300 ___ 200

5. French Fries—2.4 ounces of French fries of 20 years ago had 210 calories. How many calories do you think are in today’s portion?

___ 610 ___ 590 ___ 650

6. Turkey Sandwich—A turkey sandwich 20 years ago had 320 calories. How many calories do you think are in today’s portion?

___ 820 ___ 510 ___ 630

Answers:

1. Today’s six-inch bagel has 350 calories. This is 210 more calories than a three-inch bagel 20 years ago.

2. Today’s fast food cheeseburger has 590 calories. This is 257 more calories than a portion 20 years ago.

3. Today’s portion of spaghetti and meatballs has 1,025 calories. This includes two cups of pasta with sauce and three large meatballs. This is 525 more calories than a portion 20 years ago.

4. Today’s 20-ounce soda has 250 calories. This is 165 more calories than a portion 20 years ago.

5. Today’s 6.9-ounce portion of French fries has 610 calories. This is 400 more calories than a 2.4 oz portion 20 years ago.

6. Today’s 10-inch turkey sandwich has 820 calories. This is 500 calories more than a portion 20 years ago. ■

TIPS & TRICKS

Weighing the Evidence in Diet Ads

No question about it, counting calories and changing eating habits are a lot more daunting than the “quick fix” approaches to weight loss bombarding us in advertisements and false claims every day.

Flip through a magazine, scan a newspaper, or channel surf and you see them everywhere: Ads that promise quick and easy weight loss without diet or exercise. Wouldn't it be nice if—as the ads claim—you could lose weight simply by taking a pill, wearing a patch, or rubbing in a cream? Too bad claims like that are almost always false.

As explained by the Federal Trade Commission (www.ftc.gov), doctors, dieticians, and other experts agree that the best way to lose weight is to eat fewer calories and increase your physical activity so you burn more energy. A reasonable goal is to lose about a pound a week. For most people, that means cutting about 500 calories a day from your diet, eating a variety of nutritious foods, and exercising regularly.

When it comes to evaluating claims for weight loss products, the FTC recommends a healthy portion of skepticism. Before you spend money on

products that promise fast and easy results, weigh the claims carefully. Learn how to spot the seven claims that almost always signal a diet rip-off:

1. “Lose weight without diet or exercise!”

Achieving a healthy weight takes work. Take a pass on any product that promises miraculous results without the effort. Buy one and the only thing you'll lose is money.

2. “Lose weight no matter how much you eat of your favorite foods!”

Beware of any product that claims that you can eat all you want of high-calorie foods and still lose weight. Losing weight requires sensible food choices. Filling up on healthy vegetables and fruits can make it easier to say no to fattening sweets and snacks.

3. “Lose weight permanently! Never diet again!”

Even if you're successful in taking the weight off, permanent weight loss requires permanent lifestyle changes. Don't trust any product that promises once-and-for-all results without ongoing maintenance.

4. “Block the absorption of fat, carbs, or calories!”

Doctors, dieticians, and other experts agree that there's simply no magic non-prescription pill that will allow you to block the absorption of fat, carbs, or calories. The key to curbing your craving for those “downfall foods” is portion control. Limit yourself to a smaller serving or a slimmer slice.

5. “Lose 30 pounds in 30 days!”

Losing weight at the rate of a pound or two a week is the most effective way to take it off and keep it off. At best, products promising lightning-fast weight loss are false. At worst, they can ruin your health.

6. “Everybody will lose weight!”

Your habits and health concerns are unique. There is simply no one-size-fits-all product guaranteed to work for everyone. Team up with your health care provider to design a personalized nutrition and exercise program suited to your lifestyle and metabolism.

7. “Lose weight with our miracle diet patch or cream!”

You've seen the ads for diet patches or creams that claim to melt away the pounds. Don't believe them. There's nothing you can wear or apply to your skin that will cause you to lose weight. ■

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