

# **If You're Very Overweight**

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If you are fifty or one hundred or more pounds overweight, you don't need anybody to tell you what you want to do. You want to lose that excess weight—permanently. You want it to be the last time you have to do this.

You also know that before you undertake any serious weight loss program, especially one that involves a great deal of weight loss, you should consult your physician and find out what you can and cannot do concerning diet and exercise, and even have them monitor you along the way. Once you get that squared away, you can proceed safely as well as effectively.

This is not going to be an article that tells you exactly what nutrition and exercise programs you must choose. Instead, we'll give you a framework, with some ideas and directions on how to go about setting up your plan. These things can help.

## **1. Get On Your Own Plan**

What this means is that you need to do something that is appropriate for you, not someone else. While this seems self-evident, it isn't. You need to find an approach to nutrition and exercise that fits your specific needs, that will work for you, that is going to bring you lasting results and not frustration, injury or illness.

This could mean something as simple as doing an exercise or workout which is unconventional, or that almost no one else is doing, or a dietary plan where you have a lot of input and wide latitude in selecting what is to be eaten, what isn't, and how much. Maybe you like to work out for ten minutes two or three times a day, or swim though everyone else tells you they do aerobics. Maybe you prefer real food to shakes and pills, powders or bars. The whole idea here is that you and your specific problems and abilities are unique, and you should treat yourself that way. It's also the most practical way to get better results.

## **2. Go Easy, Even Gently, With Exercise**

Exercise can be a beneficial, important aspect of your plan. How much? How difficult? What should you do? Should you exercise at all? While the modern trend in training is to train people very hard, even excessively so, this is not a good thing for you when you are very overweight. While it is often a questionable practice even for accomplished, dedicated athletes and fitness people, when you have a large body mass or have been sedentary, or aren't capable yet of much physical activity, it does very little good and potentially a lot of harm just to be thrown into a program which requires intensive effort. So this can be a concern;

ease into efforts initially, as opposed to jumping into an extremely vigorous exercise program, or the wrong exercises for you.

Some suggestions might include simple stretching or yoga, or water-workouts which should be easier on the joints, or even light calisthenics or light weight training while seated in a chair, riding a stationary bike as opposed to jogging, or opting for tai chi, instead of more vigorous karate or other martial arts. You get the idea; low impact, non-violent yet beneficial exercise. What you want to do to is exercise productively and safely.

### **3. Nourish Yourself**

While the matter of exercise when you're overweight is important, the matter of food is critical. This is not news. Within the context of your genetic profile and possible medical conditions, your nutrition becomes the central issue. Even though you are going to be dieting, you should strive to get on a nutritional plan which will allow you to have a sufficient amount of food, and get the maximum nutritional value from whatever you are eating. Sheer deprivation diets, diet plans that allow for very little real food, which only consist of shakes and pills or synthetic "diet" foods, may not deliver the nutrition you need, and they will deprive you of the sensation of pleasure when eating. So that's a doubly discouraging situation.

If you are one of the rare people who prefers the challenge of a stricter diet, and can tolerate it, fine. But avoid the fad diets, crash diets, or the quick-fix celebrity diets. If you need to or are required medically to go on an extreme diet, do so under medical supervision. Yet if you have some latitude in your diet with the option of eating more calories, and you're still considering a highly restricted calorie diet, for example, try to see if you can get on a plan which calls for 1,500 calories or 2,000 per day, rather than an extreme 500 calorie plan which barely features real food.

If you have a choice, why not opt for the more relaxed plan? It's been pointed out many, many times, that gradual, long-term approaches usually work best. Rebound weight gain is commonly a byproduct of dieting for almost everyone, more so for the very overweight, especially when the weight is taken off in a too-fast, extra-grueling way. Crash diets and fads are potentially harmful this way. The goal is to lose the weight, hopefully permanently, not to punish yourself or see how much unpleasantness you can inflict on yourself or withstand.

### **4. Set Realistic Goals**

Ambition, desire, will power—these can all be good things, in the right hands and properly applied. Wanting to lose weight—even a lot of weight, can be a great desire, and having the ambition to do something about it can set you on course to a life-changing experience. Throw in the added will power to keep you

going when exercising or dieting, or when life's obstacles or difficulties, or training and dieting troubles leap out at you—seemingly from nowhere when you're otherwise doing well—and you've got a potent mix, a real chance at beneficial changes. And that's all good.

Conversely, many start out with great desire, even lots of ambition to implement their plans, and work hard at it, but then falter in any number of ways: they may lose interest, desire, or after a series of difficulties, they may abandon what was their original worthwhile project of losing weight.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of ways things can go wrong, and anything undertaken that's worthwhile can become difficult. But the two most common difficulties to watch for are: First, starting out with great enthusiasm, then finding that enthusiasm for your weight loss project rapidly drains away. This causes you to readily abandon, even though you don't really want to.

Second, many start out with extremely ambitious goals—things which might be achievable if the goals were slightly modified—but trying to reach overly ambitious goals quickly leads to disappointment, a feeling of failure, and abandonment of your weight loss project. Trying to lose 200 pounds in a couple of months would be an unrealistic, dangerous goal. Yet, as so often is the case, these unrealistic goals can become manageable with a shift of one element, in this case the element of time.

Do what the cyclists of the Tour de France do. When confronted with a four or six-hour race, one hundred miles or longer, up the seemingly insurmountable mountains of the Alps or the Pyrenees, they break the task down into smaller segments, first in their minds, then with their bodies. They concentrate on the miles immediately in front of them, the hills they must climb, one by one. Piece by piece, they construct their race in their mind, and eventually with their minds, bodies, and strong wills, they climb their mountains, finish their race, reach their goals. You can do the same.

You might be able to lose 200 pounds—permanently--in six months or a year or two years or longer, if you break it up into smaller, workable pieces. Go pound by pound, day by day. Then, your goal becomes not only achievable, where it wasn't before, but you can do it in a healthy and far less stressful way, lessening the strain physically and emotionally. This is the way to go.

## **5. Things to Watch For**

"I like to kick my clients' butts." This is what I read or hear from trainers or prospective trainers, or even from their clients, who are the ones getting their butts kicked. Now this questionable attitude which permeates sports teams, athletic training, and fitness training, sometimes even rehabilitation, has filtered all the way into weight loss or more casual training. It's as if this is the way an

otherwise sedentary middle-aged woman who's perhaps an office worker, and not a world-class athlete, bodybuilder or fitness person, is supposed to work out. She is supposed to train until or beyond exhaustion, until everything hurts, and diet on a rigid, extreme program, usually of near-total deprivation, that would tax the patience and the body of a world-class professional athlete. It's not just a silly or unproductive way to train, it's dangerous. And it is just plain wrong.

Seek out a trainer, if you use one, who is going to help you and not abuse you. Someone standing over you screaming at you or forcing you to do exercises that hurt or injure you is not helping you. You should not be put in pain, you should be putting out whatever effort is reasonable or appropriate for your physical condition and goals --remember getting on your own plan and going easy and gently? Your diet should not be a "killer" diet. It should, again, be appropriate for your condition and your goals. Seek out people who are going to help you, who are going to train you and not injure you or inflict pain, and who are going to help you with your eating rather than try to punish or starve you.

## **6. Motivation & Support**

If you need additional external motivation, whatever works for you is good. Perhaps you have a friend who was very overweight, and they lost a lot of it. Similarly, let their success encourage you; let this friend who lost weight personally encourage you if they want to. Some people respond better to others helping them along the way, so why not take advantage of that?

If it helps you, also, feel free to exercise with a friend or friends in a group if that's what you want, or alone if you're more comfortable. Everybody's different, with different needs and emotional makeup. And if you need to have friends or like-minded people support you emotionally in your project, you can find them. There are even groups and organizations which will do this. They can help you through any rough spots you might hit along the way. Many are helped by this.

## **7. Inspiration**

Inspiration is often downplayed, but it can't hurt in any difficult endeavor. And losing a lot of weight, attempting to permanently change your body and your health, can be difficult. But it's important to remember why you want to do it, and why it's worthwhile to you. There must be reasons you originally wanted to do this, even if later they become unclear to you. Remember them, so you can recall them later. Maybe write them down at first, and refer to them. Perhaps there is something you want to do with your life in conjunction with your weight loss project, or afterwards.

Perhaps you will lose five or ten extra pounds initially in your program, with a reasonable effort. This is a small yet significant success. Take pride in whatever small goals you reach; let it inspire more action, more success. Build on it. And

note what you consider as failures, learn something if you can, but don't dwell on them, simply move on. Count your successes and forget your failures. Let every moment of success, no matter how seemingly insignificant, inspire you.

And what's the greatest inspiration of all? Deciding and, yes, trying to do and doing this task you've set for yourself, and beginning to get your own good results. With any good results that you get, let that be the greatest inspiration for continued, better, and lasting results. Ultimately, the greatest inspiration for you will be you, and that you are doing a great thing for yourself.

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