

Why Chronic Dieting Doesn't Work

DIET DISASTER

Only 5 percent of all dieters will have maintained their weight loss at the end of one year. That's not too encouraging when you consider the average American diets three to four times annually. Why are so many people involved in this self-defeating act? An obsession with thinness and the myth that dieting will help you permanently lose weight has Americans running to buy diet aids to the tune of 10 billion dollars per year. But the bottom line is that "diets" don't work.

DIETING ATTITUDES

One comedian said the root of the word diet is "to die." It conjures up a life filled with deprivation and wilted celery sticks. The common phrase "going on a diet" gives you the feeling that it's something you start but are able to quit. The thought of dieting makes you hungry for foods you had even forgotten about. Dieting may be the "in" social thing to do but the statistics show that it's simply not working.

WHY DIETS DON'T WORK...

People who diet often can lower their metabolisms enough to decrease their caloric needs. This can be done in two ways:

First, a diet of less than 1,000–1,200 calories can actually cause a starvation-like state and force your body to conserve calories. The body will cut back its caloric needs to survive.

Therefore, you won't lose more in the long run on a

500-calorie diet than you would on one above 1,000 calories. This starvation state can lower your metabolism for as much as one year.

Second, crash dieting can change your body's composition. Let's say you lost 10 pounds in two weeks. Most of that weight was water (5 pounds), some was fat (3 pounds) and the rest was muscle (2 pounds). When the weight is regained (as 95 percent is), it comes back in the form of fat and water. Every future diet can perpetuate this downward cycle of muscle loss; the chronic dieter may change his or her percentage of body fat over time from 25 percent to 35 or 40 percent. Surprisingly, the scale may not show large amounts of weight change. Muscle burns up more calories than fat and chronic dieting makes you lose a large percentage of what helps you keep trim. This yo-yo effect of losing and regaining can harm your body. It's better to never have dieted at all than to keep losing and regaining the same 10 to 20 pounds.

WHAT DOES WORK

What *does* help you lose and maintain weight is healthy eating habits and a more active lifestyle. Take a fresh look at your daily diet and exercise routine—get rid of the idea that a diet is something to endure for a month after which you can go back to your old habits. Make short- and long-term goals to slowly change your lifestyle to include healthier food choices and to be more active at work and play. You'll be healthier and happier when you give up dieting and will be closer to achieving a permanent weight change by focusing on the quality of your diet and exercise habits.

