

Succeeding with your New Year's Weight Loss Resolution

By Neil Doldo, MA, CPT

Every year, men and women of all ages decide this is the year that they will take off those unwanted pounds. Unfortunately, even those with the best intentions will not realize their goals for a number of reasons. One's failure in the ability to lose weight and keep it off arises because typically the individual ignores one of the many factors that equally contribute to safe and effective weight reduction.

The equation for weight loss is pretty simple: You must burn more calories than you consume. More specifically, in order to lose 1 pound of fat, you must have a negative balance of 3500 calories. Research has shown that this negative caloric balance is very hard to attain with diet or exercise only, and that the most effective weight loss programs combine modest reductions in daily calorie intake with a regular, moderate-intensity exercise routine. Therefore, diet, exercise, and lifestyle modifications are all essential components to consider if you are serious about permanent weight loss. Here are some tips for each facet of weight loss that will help you achieve your goals:

DIET: For most people a low fat, reduced calorie diet is the safest and most effective method. One relatively easy way to achieve negative balance is to take out about 300-500 calories each day. This can be done through simply reducing portion sizes or cutting "calorie dense" foods (those high in fat content). This will allow you to still eat most of the foods you want, just in moderation. Other ways to effectively cut calories is to eat leaner cuts of meat (beef or pork tenderloin, chicken, fish), substitute sodas or fruit drinks with water, or switching to low calorie versions of some foods (Caution: still try to stick to small servings, i.e.- just because its low-calorie doesn't mean you can eat more of it!!). If you are still having trouble, try keeping a comprehensive diet log to track your calories or consult a registered dietitian.

EXERCISE: The other component to achieving negative balance is burning calories through exercise. Studies show that exercising at least three times per week can aid in weight loss. More importantly, exercise intensity is the key to burning calories. Many people fail with weight loss because they are not exercising *hard* enough to produce the desired result, even if they are going to the gym on a regular basis. For cardiovascular exercise, make sure that you are *in your target heart rate zone* for at least 30 minutes in order to burn sufficient calories. Moderate strength straining is also important because the increases in muscle mass will increase your resting metabolism, or the number of calories you burn at rest. Try performing strength exercises for all areas of the body 2-3 times per week, with a moderate intensity of 1-2 sets of each exercise, 10-15 repetitions per set. If you are still having trouble losing the excess fat, try some group exercise classes or hire a personal trainer for an extra boost. As with any exercise program, make sure you consult your physician prior to beginning a program.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES: The most important aspect to keeping the weight off after all your hard work is not reverting to your old habits. Although you may no longer be restricting your calorie intake, make sure you are maintaining portion control and eating low-fat foods. More importantly, studies show exercise alone at least three times per week after significant weight loss is effective in keeping those unwanted pounds from coming back.

