

Food for thought – dieting

January wouldn't be complete without thoughts of losing those extra pounds that may have settled around the waist, or hips, over the festive period!

Many people will 'go on a diet' each and every January. Their willpower and self control will last for a while, maybe long enough to shed the extra pounds, but maybe not. Most successful weight loss regimes include exercise and, if we exercise regularly, we may be able to increase our training and activity levels for a while and eat normally instead of having to cut down drastically on food and drink.

Willpower isn't enough to reduce weight permanently, however, and to get that outcome we need to change our habits. Different approaches will work for different people, but here are a few ideas:

Try to eat at approximately the same times each day, whether this is two or five times a day. This will help you to avoid unplanned meals and snacks which may be high in calories.

- Pick a meal pattern that fits your daily routine and stick to it.
- If you do tend to snack, try to do so at around the same time each day.

If you like to snack, choose a healthy option such as fresh fruit or low calorie yoghurts instead of chocolate or crisps.

- Have a banana instead of a standard sized chocolate bar and save around 150 calories.
- Take a piece of fruit to work with you.
- Choose yoghurts with less than 100 calories per pot and your bones will benefit from the calcium, without adding excess calories to your day.

Be careful about headline food claims. Check the label for fat and sugar content as lower fat options may have high sugar levels.

- A low fat digestive biscuit has the same number of calories as a standard digestive biscuit (70 calories).
- Low fat yoghurts may have as many calories as standard offerings.

Think about your drinks; choose water or sugar-free squashes. Unsweetened fruit juice is high in natural sugar, so limit yourself to having one glass per day (200ml or 1/3 pint). Alcohol is high in calories, too, so limit the amount that you drink regularly.

- A pint of 3-4% beer or lager contains two units of alcohol and 150-180 calories.
- A 250ml glass of 12% wine contains three units of alcohol and 150-180 calories.

Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, whether fresh, frozen, dried or tinned (one portion is 80g fresh, frozen or tinned fruit or vegetables, or 30g dried fruit).

- A medium sized apple or banana or three heaped tablespoons of peas is one portion.
- Try to have some fruit or vegetables with every meal, making it easier to reach five a day.

Break up your sitting time – stand up for 10 minutes out of every hour.

- Standing up on the train or bus burns an extra 70 calories per hour.
- When watching TV, try to get up during the ad breaks and maybe do a few chores such as washing the dishes or putting out the rubbish.

Losing weight slowly and steadily is the most successful long term strategy. Reducing your food and drink intake by 500 calories a day, or increasing your exercise levels by the same amount, results in a weight loss of 1-2 pounds a week. If you do 'dry January' (or February!) and you make a conscious effort to increase your activity levels, which could be as simple as walking and moving around more during the working day, those excess pounds could fall off relatively easily.

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