

WEIGHT LOSS AND WEIGHT LOSS MAINTENANCE: ASSURING LONG TERM SUCCESS THROUGH SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

Many people have lost and regained hundreds of pounds over the course of their lifetime. This raises several important questions about the process of weight loss and the impact that this process has on personal health and well-being. This handout is designed to help you clarify the essential issues that must be addressed to achieve your goals safely and effectively, and to develop a lifestyle that can be successful for the rest of your life.

The foundation of this program is characterized by the acronym DESIRE that stands for:

- D**iet – determine and develop the best one for you
- E**xercise – finding your long-term program is essential
- S**tructure – guidelines and framework are important for each area
- I**ntegrative healthcare team – contact people to help you
- R**ealistic goals – necessary to maintain for life long benefit
- E**motional eating – must be addressed effectively

This program must be individualized to be truly successful. However, it may evolve over time with trial and error. Some research suggests that people try to lose weight 3-5 times before they are successful. Don't be discouraged and don't give up.

The important parts:

1. **DIET** – If you have lost weight before, you have a history that can help determine the best dietary guidelines for you. Examine what you have tried, how successful it was, what you liked and disliked about it, and why you stopped. So whether it is The Carbohydrate Addicts Diet, Weight Watchers, The Zone, LA Weightloss, Atkins or others, determine what is best. Also, determine and define therapeutic and maintenance phases of the diet that will be important at different times. Finally, all issues that may derail your effort must be addressed from sugar or carbohydrate cravings to social situations, holidays and any other factors or circumstances.
2. **EXERCISE** – Research suggests that this may actually be the most important factor for long-term success. Exercise may be defined simply by movement, activity or by numbers of steps taken in a day. It may also be characterized by aerobic exercise on a treadmill, bicycle, or Nordic track as well as by weight training, exercise classes and many other ways. It is essential, however, to define, characterize and follow through on this piece for a lifetime.

3. **STRUCTURE** – It is important to set specific guidelines for each of the DESIRE issues. As mentioned previously, this may change over time by choice or by uncontrolled circumstances, yet it is well established that the more clear the framework is, the better the results will be. A journal or logbook where these issues and guidelines are listed and discussed is highly recommended.
4. **INTEGRATIVE HEALTHCARE TEAM** – The specific types of practitioners and number may vary but it is vital to have the support that you need to develop, refine and maintain your program. This is especially true when you have not been doing well with your diet and/or exercise plan, and you need some encouragement, support and specific recommendations. Find people who you know will be there for you. Practitioners could include a primary care physician (PCP), nutritionist, personal trainer, psychologist and/or others.
5. **REALISTIC GOALS** – There is nothing more discouraging than setting a goal and struggling to achieve it. More often than not, there is an unforeseen circumstance or expectation that needs to be examined and a goal adjusted to help the process go more smoothly. For weight loss, the first goal should be to lose 5-15% of your weight if you are moderately to severely overweight. The reason for this is that research suggests that this produces the greatest reduction in risks to your health and I would argue that this is the most important goal. It is also true that if diet, exercise and/or other necessary approaches are so severe that it is almost impossible to get there, then it will be impossible to maintain.
6. **EMOTIONAL EATING** – Learning to control your eating, at least most of the time, is another important factor in losing weight and keeping it off. Although this can be difficult to do for some people, it will likely resurface time and again until it is addressed. To address emotional eating you must examine the questions of when, where, what and why. One technique for clarifying these questions and effectively addressing them is to eat only in one area of the home and work while doing nothing else. For some people, self-help books may be helpful and can be recommended. For others, counseling or other similar approaches may be needed.

While this covers most of the issues that are important, there may be specific circumstances that need to be addressed on an individual basis. Remember that success often does not occur on the first attempt, so make a commitment to develop and refine these areas, and you will find that you will achieve long-term success.