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Safe and smart weight loss

Written by Board Certified Family Medicine Physician
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As a primary care physician, I am asked the question “What can I do to lose weight?” on nearly a daily basis. My answer may vary for each patient, but one thing always remains the same: It has to be a lifestyle change. Depending on how much weight you want to lose

and your current lifestyle, the amount of change required will vary.

There are several commercial weight loss programs out there along with several over-the-counter pills claiming to be the best at helping a person lose weight.

There are a few basic things to keep in mind when considering any sort of weight loss pill:

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

A lifestyle change will ALWAYS be necessary with any of these (despite what the ads may say), especially if you want long-term weight loss.

None of these pills are regulated by the FDA, so there is no guarantee that they contain what is advertised and no guarantee that they may not be harmful. Just because the label says “safe” or “all natural” doesn’t mean it can’t be harmful to you.

If you do find a weight loss supplement that you are curious about trying, I would urge you to talk to your doctor first. Some seemingly safe ingredients can interact with many medications and could

potentially cause a very serious, or even life threatening, interaction.

As far as the commercial weight loss programs, some can be effective. However, talk with your doctor before starting any of these, especially if you are on any medications or have any chronic medical conditions.

There are a few prescription medications approved by the FDA for weight loss; however, that doesn’t mean these medications are safe for everyone. I feel there are some that can be effective, but again, lifestyle changes are necessary to achieve maximum benefit. Therefore, when I have patients come in and ask about any of these medications, I will have a discussion about lifestyle changes first, set a weight loss goal over a few months, and then have the patient return after that time frame. If the person has been able to incorporate the changes, and still desires to try the medication, then I will prescribe it at that time knowing it will be more effective once the patient has already initiated the lifestyle changes. Prescribing it at the initial visit often takes away the motivation to make



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the necessary changes to be successful long term.

So what types of advice do I give patients when counseling about weight loss?

What I tell each patient varies somewhat, but there are some general principles that can help almost everyone with weight loss or improving overall health. The USDA website choosemyplate.gov can be a great resource to give more details on many of the topics discussed below.

- Portion control is key. You need to become familiar with normal portion sizes.
- Eat off a salad plate rather than a dinner plate, but don't fill it back up once empty.
- If you have talked to me about weight loss in my office, then you have seen me draw a diagram of the "MyPlate" concept. This describes what a typical plate should consist of at meals: half

fruits/vegetables, 1/4 protein, and 1/4 grains.

- Don't skip breakfast. This is essential to get your metabolism going for the day.
- Eat more protein. This will keep you fuller longer.
- Don't skip meals. You need to keep fueling your body throughout the day.
- Don't starve yourself. Most women need a minimum of 1200 calories and men 1500 calories per day.
- Don't get too focused on the scale. Pay attention to how your clothes fit and how you feel. You can become more physically fit without significant weight changes.
- Set reasonable goals that you can achieve.
- Drink a minimum of 8 glasses of water daily.
- Physical activity is important. The recommended goal is 150 minutes of aerobic activity weekly. Walking is a great form of exercise, but you can talk

with your doctor about what may be best for you.

- Find a friend/family member to join you. This often helps with accountability and motivation.
- If you have certain chronic medical conditions, your doctor may recommend following more of a Mediterranean diet, as studies have shown this to be beneficial. This generally consists of more lean meats, plant-based foods, and healthy fats.
- If you have a smartphone, there are several free apps that can help track your calories, overall nutrition, and activity. I personally use the "MyFitnessPal" app. You can enter in your current weight, goal weight, and time frame in which you want to achieve this. (Keep in mind a reasonable goal to achieve long term weight loss is 1-2 pounds per week). The program then gives you your daily calorie goal and has an extensive database of foods to search to enter what you eat. I have found it to be a useful tool to help keep track of my overall nutrition and often recommend it to patients as well.

For more information or to schedule an appointment please call 605-665-8910.