



## **Sustainable Weight Loss ... Why is it so Difficult?**

One of the most common topics I get asked about at Physical Dimensions revolves around weight loss and the problems associated with keeping excess weight off in the long term. Unfortunately there is no easy solution to this problem, and more often than not it requires a multi-faceted approach addressing the physical, nutritional, psychological and social aspects of the lifestyle. But if all that sounds a bit daunting you shouldn't be discouraged - the rewarding benefits of living your life the way biology intended far outweighs all the hard work and discipline required to achieve your goals. To give yourself the best chance of succeeding in your quest you need to plan a strategy that you can incorporate into your everyday life. By adhering to the following recommendations you will maximise your chances of achieving sustainable weight loss in a safe, healthy and enjoyable way.

**Be honest:** People who struggle with their weight or those who are trying to lose some weight but are not making much progress, tend to overestimate the amount of activity they participate in and underestimate the amount of food and drink they consume. It is human nature to exaggerate facts that will make you look and sound good and to skew or withhold facts that will minimise peoples' negative perceptions of you, but it's very important that you try to provide as much accurate information as possible to those that you have sought help from. Withholding details or

giving false information will almost certainly result in an unsuitable exercise plan and nutritional guidance. I always recommend that clients keep a food diary of the food they've consumed, and an exercise log of the activities they've completed.

**Be realistic:** Weight tends to creep on steadily over a period of time, usually over many months and years, and to expect the weight to come off as easily as it went on is totally unrealistic. Through evolutionary processes the human body is extremely effective at storing body fat, but less effective at using the stored fat to fuel human movement. This perception of making seemingly little progress at reducing weight, fat and girth measurements is often de-motivating and leads to poor adherence rates for health and fitness regimes, and is the number one reason why people give up trying to lose weight.

**Goal-setting:** One of the strategies that health and fitness professionals use and recommend is goal setting. By setting short, medium and long term goals you are able to break your ultimate end goal or target down into manageable portions or time periods. This not only makes the end goal or task seem less daunting and remote - primarily because concentration is focused on the 'here and now'- but it also helps to maintain motivation and enthusiasm. Goals are designed to bring about behavioural changes and can be performance, weight or time orientated. But they do need to be achievable and realistic, and failure to adhere to these rules can, and often does lead to guilt, failure and a perceived lack of control.

**Exercise:** Becoming active after a sustained period of sedentary behaviour sets off the same complex chain of physiological, hormonal and psychological reactions that our evolutionary ancestors would have experienced many millennia ago. The difference of course is that today people become more active to prolong their life and to improve their quality of life, whereas our ancestors led extremely physically active lives merely to survive. The activities they would have participated in would have been limited to include things such as hunting, fishing, trekking and log cutting. Today, thankfully, our choices are as wide and as varied as the people participating in them.

The type, duration, frequency and intensity of exercise needs to be dependent upon the person's goals and should be specific to their ability to perform the exercise. Though it is true that any activity will positively aid the weight loss process, health professionals will always advise people

to follow a well structured and suitable exercise regime that incorporates all of these considerations. It's imperative that whatever activity you choose to do, you get some enjoyment from it. Life is too short to take part in activities that you don't enjoy, and it's far more likely that you won't persevere with it long enough to derive significant benefits from it. And remember to change your routines regularly. There is a famous adage in the health and fitness industry that says, '*...if you do what you always did, you'll get what you always got...*'

**Nutrition:** Glance through any glossy lifestyle magazine, newspaper supplement or turn on to one of the many lifestyle television shows and you'll see a plethora of celebrity endorsed diets and miracle weight loss remedies – well don't be fooled! Don't be fooled into thinking there is a panacea for quick and easy weight loss – it doesn't exist.

The human body is incredibly resilient, but modern living has shown up some of its shortcomings. When a person becomes more active, and starts consuming food for the purpose of fuelling the body rather than **just** for the pleasure of eating, they do, in essence begin to use their body the way nature intended. Unfortunately, not enough years have passed to allow it to evolve to cope with 24hr food outlets, labour saving devices, computer games and comprehensive transport modes and networks. The human survival systems which were once called upon each winter or during times of famine, are now no longer required in the western world. The body's ability to store fat, and to reduce calorie expenditure when calorie intake is suppressed, is now one of the main reasons why obesity and obesity related diseases are at near pandemic levels in the developed world, and why for the first time ever, in certain parts of the world, there are generations of teenagers who have a lower life expectancy than their parents.

But knowing what, when and how much to eat needn't be the minefield that some think. Yes, there are many mixed media messages about what is good for you and what isn't, and what you must eat and what you must avoid but good impartial advice is available.

Health professionals will always advise those seeking sustainable weight losses, to keep things simple. At Physical Dimensions we use the principles of nutritional science when recommending calorie intake and ratios of food from the different food groups; and like the exercises we recommend, nutrition intake is specific to the individual and will vary from one person to the other. There are however, a few golden rules you should adhere too. Firstly, it's very tempting to

restrict the intake of calories, but care must be taken. Cutting your calorie intake too much can have a detrimental effect in any quest for sustainable weight loss, and may contribute to the slowing down of the metabolic rate and potentially lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

Secondly, always try to eat complex carbohydrates after you have exercised. There is a very narrow time window after you have exercised when your body can restore its muscle glycogen stores. Ideally within two hours of finishing exercising, consume complex carbohydrates such as pasta, rice or potatoes. And thirdly, make sure you fully hydrate yourself before, during and post exercise. Recent research suggests you can increase your metabolism by more than 30% when you stay hydrated.

As with most things in life, it is important to strike a balance in the things that you do, and exercise is no different. Whilst it is important that you exercise regularly and at an intensity which you find challenging, you must ensure that you allow your body time to recover from the exertion placed upon it. This is even more important for those who are returning to exercise after a number of years. It is during these rest periods that your body adapts and grows to cope with the new workloads you are asking it to perform, and its importance cannot be underestimated. Don't be tempted to do too much too soon; build up the intensity and duration of the exercises gradually, and try to incorporate a variety of different exercises into your regime.

Finally, whatever you do it is very important that your desire to lose weight doesn't take over your life. Sustainable weight loss is far more likely to be achieved when you incorporate these changes into your everyday life.

Physical Dimensions offers a range of cost effective services to guide and instruct you in your quest for a healthy body and mind. For more detail please contact Lee.