weight loss:

fast vs slow and steady

A RECENT STUDY ADVOCATES THE ADVANTAGES OF RAPID WEIGHT LOSS, BUT CAN IT REALLY WORK IN THE LONG TERM? WORDS BY RUSSELL COX

Weight loss of 1-1.5kg per week is considered steady and maintainable. Greater than 1.5kg per week is fast and the consensus, despite some recent media reports, is that the lost weight is difficult to keep off.

The human body has a natural resistance to change. This is just as well – otherwise when you have a blowout weekend of bad eating and drinking, you'd be turning up for work on Monday unrecognisabale and wouldn't fit into your clothes!

Your body requires consistent, ongoing change of diet and energy expenditure before adaptations (in this case, weight loss) will occur. Known as your body's 'natural resistance to change', this factor has a direct influence on the effectiveness of all weight loss programs – whether they're designed for slow and steady or quick weight loss.

How so? A weight loss program needs to provide enough stimulus to your body to elicit a change, ie a decrease in body fat, but not so much stimulus that your body's resistance to change mechanism kicks in. This is when body fat levels are maintained to use as fuel in the future because it thinks it's being starved and switches to survival mode.

It's well accepted that quick weight loss is difficult to maintain. The psychological factors that contribute to this may be more relevant than the scientific. Quick weight loss programs are hard work, involving discomfort and displeasure from hunger, mood swings due to low blood sugar and lack of satisfaction at meal times. These negative experiences can result in a psychological compensation, which often manifests in comfort eating/over-indulging in all the foods that were excluded from the diet and results in your hard-earned weight loss quickly disappearing.

Slower, less strict and more balanced eating plans allow the same results to be achieved, albeit over a longer period of time. Having suffered less deprivation during the weight loss process due to the dietary restrictions being more moderate, you should be less likely to feel the psychological need to compensate with poor eating and drinking habits the minute your goal weight is achieved.

If the 'diet' is actually an eating plan that can be adjusted to include a few more enjoyable foods for the occasional treat or reward once the goal has been achieved then maintenance of the weight loss and adherence to the eating plan are much more achievable, especially for those of us who do not have the will power of a super human.

Finally the pain and suffering of a quick-fix diet for that upcoming social event is, let's face it, hell on yourself, your family and your colleagues. Is all the angst and deprivation really worth it for the period of time you actually get to enjoy your leaner body? Do those around you a favour and start your weight loss program earlier rather than later!

If you've run out of time and are desperate to lose those couple of kilos, consult your GP before undertaking any fast-track weight loss programs – they can have serious health implications.

The longer the duration of, and the more often 'quick fix' weight loss programs are undertaken, the greater the negative effect on your overall health. **bella**

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