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perfect fit

Constant dieting, without exercise, and obsession with weight loss could actually fuel weight gain!

I'VE been on a diet for two weeks, and all I've lost is two weeks.

- Totie Fields

Paradoxically, the more we (as a population) pursue fat loss, the more our statistics reflect rising rates of long term, overall fat gain, and incidence of eating disorders. I suspect that consistent dieting without exercise and constant obsession with weight loss may actually be fuelling these increases.

The deprivation of crash dieting causes an increased preoccu-



pation with food. Overeating and bingeing are common responses to these dietary restrictions.

Today's Notion of Beauty

The media bombards us with female fashion models that project the emaciated, twiggy, adolescent look, as the aesthetic ideal. What we fail to understand, is that the published images of these models have been touched up to remove any flaws such as wrinkles, visible pores, or fat layers.

They are sometimes elongated to maximize thinness, and in certain cases generated in totality on a computer!

Articles in women's magazines then send out a negative undercurrent, that you are not good enough as you are!

Your natural appearance, including your body weight, is unacceptable and needs improvement. So buy something to either mask it, or to fix it!

Men's magazines also send out similar messages to their readers. Increasingly we see images of young, tanned men with washboard abs, a head full of hair, and broad chests.

Not surprisingly, this generates the constant urge and the battle within us to come out on top and achieve this near-impossible ideal. Our Bollywood actors and actresses, from robust, rotund figures and physiques, have now come down to comparatively skinny, slim ones over the past 3-5 years. They, in turn, greatly impact their viewers.

The Psychological Whip

The desire to diet, out of disgust with fat and appearance is a psychologically negative, shame-

centered experience. The dieter keeps telling herself that she has been bad and lacks self-restraint.

This leads to the feeling that she cannot get the love, attention, acceptance, prosperity, adoration, career, success and happiness that she craves for in her current body. Crash dieting is a form of self-punishment and is equivalent to imprisoning oneself in a diet prison. This is described in the Yo-Yo Dieting Syndrome. Also known as the weight loss/regain cycle.

The Yo-Yo Dieting Syndrome and The Set-Point Theory

Don't worry about losing too much weight, you'll find it exactly where you lost it.

- Robert Half

Fad and crash diets seriously jeopardise our health and they just do not work. Here's how.

Crash diets (below 500 calories per day) cause a loss of potassium and nitrogen in the body. This loss triggers a mechanism in the body that causes us to hold on to our fat stores and turn to muscle protein or energy instead.

Scientists have speculated that within each of us is a unique 'set point mechanism' that regulates the amount of fat we carry. This is a survival mechanism of our species. It's a way of stocking up for emergencies, starvation and famine.

If the body perceives that it is starving, as it does when we crash diet or fast, the set-point kicks into action, causing the body to keep a tenacious grip on its fat stores.

In a bid to get out of this situation and to replenish itself, the body will first cause you to crave food - most commonly foods that are fuel-dense, high-caloried sugars and fats.

If you stand your ground and resist these cravings, the body's net line of defense will be to react by slowing down the mechanism in order to conserve calories. In the face of such a food deprivation crisis, the body holds onto its fat for dear life!

For instance, let's imagine your body burns 1,500 calories per day. When on a crash diet, the body perceiving a threat to its very existence, will cause you to crave food. If you successfully make it through that checkpoint, the body will resort next to lowering its metabolism, let's say to 1,300 calories per day to conserve energy.

It's a bit like driving your car in the first gear and thereby burning a lot more fuel, or driving it in the fourth gear and burning a whole lot less. The distance covered though (the work done) is just the same.

As time goes by, when you stubbornly hold on to your diet regime, the body feels the need to source out other fuel stores. Desperate times, desperate measures!

So another trick is to start dipping into your body's muscle stores and deplete them for energy. So, you lose muscle!

After a while, you finally realize that this is just not working out the way you wanted. You're not looking or feeling good and your fat stores are largely intact!

So, disheartened, you return to your normal eating patterns. Or possibly, even worse. Having been deprived of food for so long, it's not unnatural to start bingeing. Body weight now quickly increases in the form of



A diet must be complemented with an exercise regime if there is to be any weight loss

fat and not the muscle that has been depleted.

Also, your metabolism will not rise again to 1,500 calories as in your pre-diet days, but will remain at 1,300 calories per day. This gives you a surplus of 200 calories per day, which will be stored as body fat.

Some of the most common fat collection sites for women are the lower belly, hips, inner and outer thighs, and triceps (back of the upper arms). For men, fat tends to stay focussed around the middle and on the back. So now, these are the areas where this excess fat will build up (or further build up, as the case may be).

Having gained fat and inches in this way after a certain period of time, one would typically get back onto another crash diet with renewed vigour and commitment.

Now, at this stage

- Your metabolic rate will take another dive, eg from 1,300 to 1,100 calories.

- Your body will start dipping into the remainder of your muscle stores for energy again.

- Your fat stores remain mostly intact.

- Due to increased lipoprotein lipase activity (in layman's language, the result here is that the body becomes more efficient at storing fat, which is triggered by crash dieting), we set the stage for gaining fat a lot faster when we come off the diet. Due to this we get caught up in perpetual dieting.



When you get off your diet

1. Your metabolic rate will remain at 1,100 calories per day, leaving you with a surplus of 200 calories, in addition to the 200 from the previous attempt.

2. Weight gained will be in the form of fat, and not the muscle that has been lost.

...And the cycle perpetuates itself...

In conclusion, every time you crash diet, you lose more and more muscle, drop your metabolic rate lower and lower, and end up gaining more and more fat!

So you're crashed head-on right in the devil you were running so hard and fast from!

Not only this, but we receive inadequate nutrients in imbalanced combinations. The entire body is taxed.

Studies show that Yo-Yo dieting leads to an increased risk of diabetes, heart disease and hypertension.

Break Free!

So if crash dieting doesn't work, then what exactly does? You already know the answer! Exercise, in combination with a sensible diet.

The Key

- Find moderation and consistency in a combination of a sensible diet with exercise. Compulsive exercise is as unhealthy as compulsive eating.

- Exercise aerobically at least three times a week and gradually build it up to four or five times, but not more than six.

- The body needs at least one day to rest and repair itself. Aerobic activities includes dance aerobics, walking, jogging, swimming, cycling, rope skipping, and more. Take on an activity that you like.

- Exercise continuously for at least 30 minutes, 45-60 minutes being ideal. Start with 30 and then gradually build on it.

- Include strength / resistance / weight training in your routine.

- Don't bite off more than you can chew. If you go rushing into an over demanding schedule, you may end up unable to cope with it, which in turn will get you to possibly abandon the programme altogether.

- Remember to always warm up and cool down. Inadequacy in this department is a major cause of injuries. The warm up ought to include a combination of stretches, whole body moves & limbering exercises which will get the muscles and heart ready to work.

The cool down aims at bringing your heart rate back to near normal levels and to help stretch and relax the muscles you have

worked so hard.

This is important as leaving the muscles in a contracted state instead of stretching them could cause stiffness and soreness, which is typical 24 to 48 hours post exercise. This can lead to muscle cramps and injury.

- Wear comfortable clothes. Cottons are preferred (especially during the hotter months of the year) as they allow the body to breathe easily, thereby facilitating body temperature regulation.



Synthetics, like lycra,

- Nylon and spandex on the other hand are avoidable, as they don't let the skin & therefore the body, breathe easily.

- Wear a good pair of thick-soled sneakers. They'll keep you light and sturdy on your feet and provide adequate shock absorption. They'll help enormously in injury prevention.

- Keep the principle of overload in mind. Once your body gets used to or adapts to a particular exercise, and it begins to get easier, it is important to overload in order to continue seeing results. Otherwise, you'll stop seeing regular results.

Your body just gets immune to your workout! But give yourself time to adapt to the new activity before you decide to take on a more challenging level.

One can overload by training harder, longer, more often, or by changing the type of activity to something more challenging.

Feel good about the small changes you'll notice regularly. Notice when your clothes start getting looser and people start commenting on how slimmer you've become.

You'll start getting stronger, you'll be mentally more alert.. Really, the benefits are unending.

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