

Article 11 – Weight loss Part One.

Weight control is an issue which many people struggle with throughout their lives - unnecessarily so in many cases. You may hear it referred to as middle-age spread, love handles, having a spare tyre or plain old being over-weight. We have had increasing numbers of people through the clinic seeking ways of addressing weight issues, so I thought it would be a good idea to take a look at what contributes to the problem and the best ways of resolving it. This will require a look at the most obvious factors such as diet and exercise, but will also cover less recognized contributors such as stress, hormone imbalance and nutrient deficiencies. Because there is a lot of ground to cover I will do this in more than one article and I am going to start by addressing some common misconceptions, particularly in relation to diet and exercise.

It is quite common for people to think that when they are exercising, fat is being turned into muscle. Muscle is formed independently from fat and fat cells stay as fat cells; they do not change into muscle cells. When we burn fat the fat cells shrink, but the actual numbers of fat cells does not change; they simply have less fat stored in them and are therefore less plump. The best way to shrink fat cells is to give your body a reason to convert the fat to energy and the best way to do this is by exercising.

Cardiovascular exercise such as cycling, swimming, running or fast walking uphill is great for getting your heart rate up and increasing the need to burn fat. However when you focus predominantly on cardiovascular exercise without balancing it with some resistance or weight-bearing exercise, you will tend to get limited results as far as weight loss is concerned. This is because you need to build a good muscle structure as well in order to maintain your fat-burning ability through out the day. Using weights or doing any form of exercise which pushes your muscles to the edge of their ability and makes them adapt will increase muscle mass. Because muscle tissue has a high energy demand even at rest, good muscle structure is your best 24-hour-a-day fat-burning engine. This is why a combination of cardiovascular exercise and resistance exercise is so important and where weight loss is concerned, will give the best result. (Incidentally, muscle is vital for both men and women in order to maintain their ability to incorporate calcium into bones, because the regular pull of muscle on a bone will make sure that the bone is kept strong).

If you are trying to burn fat, it is usually best to do your cardiovascular exercise on an empty stomach so that the glycogen or stored energy in your muscles is depleted more quickly. This will force your body to use the fat stores for energy; in fact it has been estimated that fat burning increases by up to 300 percent by doing this. Ensure however, that you are well hydrated before you start and that you consume around 1 litre of water during each hour of exercise. When you have finished exercising, immediately eat a *small* amount of food containing a readily accessible source of carbohydrate such as fruit, oats or rice and a healthy protein such as yoghurt, nuts and seeds, protein powder or animal protein to provide your body with the means to immediately replenish and repair the muscles quickly. It is also best to do regular 40 minute to 1 hour exercise routines regularly rather than longer sessions less frequently.

Once you have started to increase your amount of muscle, you want to make sure that you keep it so that it keeps your metabolic rate up. The best way to lose muscle is not to feed it properly, and this is where the right dietary habits become important. The key thing here is to make dietary changes which are lifestyle changes and are therefore long term rather than going on a “diet” or looking for a short term

fix. For those who have been on a cycle of diets and food denial, the following way of working is often quite a challenge, because right at the heart of it is eating frequently, but smaller amounts at each sitting. (The simple reality is that if we eat more food in one sitting than our bodies have a reason to burn, we will end up storing some of it as fat which is why portion size is so important). There are three things which can make a big difference as to how much of each meal is stored as fat. These are **portion size**, food **type** and the **regularity** of the food intake. The trick is to eat a small amount of food every 3 hours which consists of protein (eg: eggs, chicken, fish, lean meats, unsweetened yoghurt) and some carbohydrates which sustain a slow release of glucose into the blood. (This is where knowledge of the glycaemic index is helpful). By doing this you ensure that your blood sugar levels are kept even, which means you turn more food into energy and store less as fat, that your immune system will work better, and that your body will be able to repair and maintain your muscle tissue properly.

There is another good reason for eating like this. A drop in blood sugar is registered by your body as a shortage of fuel. If this happens regularly, your body will try to resolve the perceived fuel shortage by lowering your metabolic rate to enable it to store more of the next meal that comes along. A lower metabolic rate equals less energy and more fat storage. If you are getting energy "crashes" or feel like going to sleep at odd times during the day, you are probably letting your blood sugar levels drop too low and your ability to burn your food for energy will be staying low as a result. Sweet cravings are another sign that your blood sugar is not being maintained well. The two most common reasons for poor blood sugar control are skipping meals or not eating frequently enough, and eating the wrong sorts of foods which release glucose into the blood too quickly. Either way it is essential that you get on top of this, and if you are not sure where to start, make a time to come and talk to me about it. (We also have glycaemic index charts available through the clinic which are free with a consultation, or cost \$3.00 over the counter. You can call us on 06 304-8177). Finally, just a quick mention about using scales. It is not uncommon for people to get into the habit of standing on their scales everyday when they perceive their weight to be an issue. Any change down is a cause for celebration and any change up is like having a bad hair day. Scales are fine if all you want to know is how much you weigh in total, but they are not useful when it comes to understanding **why** your weight has gone up or down. When trying to lose weight, many people fall into the trap of assuming that any weight loss is a good thing. This is not so, because a drop in weight could be due to a drop in fluid retention, a loss of muscle or a decrease in fat. Obviously a loss of fluid retention or fat is a good thing, but a loss of muscle is a significant problem because as I have explained above, muscle is your best fat-burner. Another thing many people fail to recognize is that muscle weighs more than fat. Exercise is the only way to increase muscle mass while also reducing the level of body fat and this can at times appear as no progress or even as an increase in weight according to the scales. For someone relying solely on scales as a means of tracking their progress, this can be demoralizing simply because they are not accounting for the changes in body composition which may be taking place. My advice is to put the scales away, use them rarely, and allow the fit of your clothes and increased strength to inform you of your progress.

So, as a summary we have:

- Eat **small** amounts of food regularly (approximately every 3 hours), keeping a close eye on portion size.

- Eat foods which are low on the glycaemic index and include protein at most meals to ensure good blood sugar control, immune function and body repair.
- Exercise regularly for 40 minutes to 1 hour at a time using a combination of cardiovascular exercise and resistance exercise.
- Ensure that you stay well hydrated and make water your first choice of beverage.
- Stay away from the scales – they don't give you the complete picture.

At the clinic we regularly run a series of three short workshops on how to lose weight healthily and avoid a rebound. The program looks at all of the things related to good blood sugar control, how to get the fat-burning process going and how to get the metabolism working properly again, with the development of a personal program for each participant based on their individual needs. Please contact Ngaire at the clinic if you are interested in participating in one and would like an outline of costs etc...

Part two on weight loss looks at the role of insulin in weight gain and whether supplements are useful in assisting weight loss.

For further help please contact us at The Self Heal Clinic on 06 304 8177. We are open Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.