Dieting: What Works?

It is estimated that one in three Canadians is either on a diet, has just fallen off a diet or intends to go on a diet. In spite of weight-loss programs and products that promise results, the number of overweight adults in Canada has doubled in the past 20 years. You are obviously not alone in your search for a weight-loss program that works.

If you have a history of weight concerns and dieting, it can be difficult to work through the feelings that come with not being able to lose those unwanted pounds. If you are someone with a history of attempted "fad" dieting, you may consider seeking support to learn how to lose pounds in a healthy way and maintain your new weight.

Understanding Dieting

Body weight is determined by the number of calories you eat and the number of calories you burn each day. To lose weight, a person needs to take in fewer calories than they use. This happens by becoming more physically active, eating less—or both.

There are many types of weight-loss programs, including:

- Do-it-yourself programs, such as those found in books.
- Non-clinical programs, such as Weight Watchers.
- Clinical programs, monitored by a dietitian or physician.

Make Changes Gradually

If you are looking to lose weight, it's helpful to change the types and amounts of food you eat gradually—especially if you would like to maintain your new weight for the long term. Your ideal diet will include many different foods to ensure enough calories and nutrients for good health.

When planning your next diet, take into account the following:

- A healthy goal is to lose approximately one pound per week.
- Be sure you're consuming adequate protein. This means 50 grams per day for women over the age of 25, and 63 grams per day for men over 25.
- Make sure you're getting enough carbohydrates—at least 100 grams per day.
- Maintain a daily fibre intake of 20 to 30 grams.
- No more than 30 per cent of your daily calorie intake should come from fat.
- Drink a minimum of eight to 10 glasses of water or water-based beverages every day.

Get Active

Including physical activity in your weight-loss program helps ensure you'll keep the weight off. Besides helping control weight, physical activity improves your strength and flexibility and lowers your risk of heart disease. It also helps to promote a sense of well-being, controls blood pressure and diabetes, and can decrease stress.

To get the maximum benefit, do 30 minutes of vigorous physical activity at least three times each week, or moderate exercise five times per week. Activities could include:

- Aerobic exercise or dancing
- Running
- Brisk walking
- Cycling
- Swimming
- Team sports

Also, you can sneak in some extra activity by:

- Taking the stairs instead of the elevator
- Walking or cycling to work
- Using a push mower to cut the grass—it’s better for the environment too
- Playing actively with colleagues, friends or children

If you are feeling frustrated by the ups and downs of fad dieting, try asking yourself:

- Am I measuring my health solely by the number on the bathroom scale?
- Is this weight-loss program scientifically valid?
- What are the health risks of the diet I’m considering?
- Is dieting getting in the way of my life?

Fad diets are often extreme and may even urge you to sacrifice necessary nutrition. These diets can often have a yo-yo effect on weight, with adherents losing a few pounds only to put them right back on—and them some. Reliable, lasting weight loss incorporates healthy lifestyle changes you can maintain. Consider this the next time you’re thinking of a new diet.