

Is Exercise the Answer to Weight Loss?

The New Years is here and resolutions, once again, abound. A number of them focus on health and weight loss, which most health experts consider one in the same. In the quest for weight loss a number of resolutions are promised; the first being “I resolve to exercise more”. This whole hearted, well intent declaration consists of one of two choices: purchase a health club membership or buying a piece of equipment for the home. The latter, without question, and admitted by eventually all, becomes an expensive clothes rack, if not a portion of a child’s fort, occasionally both. What about the gym membership? Objectives are more palpable with this resolution. For as our thought processes go, this decree will require maintenance because:

1. We paid for it – money will be withdrawn from our accounts whether or not we show up.
2. The habit will be formulated if we can stick with it for just a few days.
3. The environment is ripe for success – who wants to look like the Michelin Tire Man around all of those hard bodies?

Anyone in the health club industry will tell you the same cyclic pattern year in and year out: January thru mid March, the gym is packed with all I described above. Following, the classic scene of a deserted town right out of an old western movie, other than those hard bodies... So why does this occur? Why are so many motivated just to be disheartened, let down, feeling as if goals have been missed and logically it makes more sense to quit going altogether than put any more effort into it? The reasons of course stem from the psychological, environmental, and other areas way beyond this depiction. There is one reason, however, that may surprise even the most seasoned expert: Exercise in and of itself is grossly ineffective for weight loss.

Why is exercise not the all encompassing answer?

When you ask your personal trainer, whom you have been working with three times a week for six weeks, why the scale has not budged with your newfound effort, they are quick to concede that it is due to the fact you have been building muscle, and, they add, muscle weighs more than fat. Well...yes and no. You do gain lean mass with exercise, but it eventually peaks out. If not, Arnold Schwarzenegger would not be a rarity. The real reason the dreaded scale does not budge with your serious exercise endeavor is the fact that our bodies are homeostatic wonders. They will find balance no matter what we do to them, to what environment they are exposed, or what stressors they are placed under. With the induction of exercise into a daily regimen, calories are utilized (as we hoped and wished). We have been repeatedly informed that weight loss is a function of calories in to calories out. You are bound to gain weight with more calories being consumed than utilized, and you will lose weight when caloric expenditure exceeds intake – i.e. the purpose of our gym membership. Unfortunately, our bodies quickly figure this out and subconsciously (or not) start to consume more calories to make up the difference. Homeostasis is one of nature’s durable laws – like taxes, it is unavoidable. In reality, the more you exercise, the more you eat. Unless your caloric intake is adjusted (i.e. you work on your diet) your New Year’s resolution of weight loss will yet once again be forfeited to the following year, when another valid attempt will unfold.

What is the best way to lose weight?

Exercise is vital to health. Make no oversight on that fact. Health and exercise are like a good marriage: both need to be loved, involved, caring, committed, compassionate, and aware of each other's needs. However; the question was 'What is the best way to lose weight'? The answer is, like most of life's wonders, simple in response and difficult in execution. You want to lose weight? Learn how to eat! Your diet is the means to success. Would you like to stay motivated and use that gym membership for more than three months? This motivation comes in but one form: success. And that success comes in but one form as well; learn to eat correctly. The first refutation of this statement will come in the form of the argument made above: homeostatic mechanisms are at play – cut calories one day, make up for them the next. This fact cannot be argued, however, when one takes into account the big picture of the macronutrients involved in diet (protein, carbohydrates, and fat) and the hormonal response to food, the importance of diet and weight loss becomes apparent. The homeostatic mechanism adjusts, and you start to meet your goals.

Without a detailed understanding on what your fuel is doing to your engine, you are most certainly to become one who curses your credit card bill in July for that health club membership you have not used since February. The regulars at the gym are greatly anticipating your leaving in a few months. Do yourself and your body some good – disappoint those hard bodies. Exercise like you intended, learn to eat correctly and most importantly: have the success you are working for! Then you can happily pay your credit card bill in July.

Dr. Warren Willey is the medical director of the nationally recognized, physician-directed, Walk-In Weight Loss program and author of "What Does Your Doctor Look Like Naked: Your Guide to Optimum Health" (Tate Publishing) and "Better Than Steroids" (Trafford Publishing). Visit him online at www.walkinweightloss.com and www.eatright4u.com.