

The Science of Weight Loss

I enjoy reading and regularly scan the bestseller list posted at the Peter White Library to see what's new. Very few weeks go by without some sort of diet book rated in the top ten, each claiming the answer to permanent weight loss. Like me, you may find yourself asking, "Does this diet really work?"

Last week I attended a national conference for registered dietitians and researchers who are asking the same question. What diet, for which person, and for how long are just a few areas being studied. While no one has yet come up with a simple solution that will work for everyone, scientific studies have yielded a few clues to the weight control puzzle. Here are some of the findings from the latest studies.

Principle #1: There is no "one size fits all diet".

The evidence is clear that a sedentary individual requires a higher percentage of their calorie budget from protein to lose body fat compared to an active person. The ideal amount of protein to promote loss of body fat is based on an individual's weight, gender, medical history and activity level.

Principle #2: Exercise alone is not an effective method for weight loss.

To lose two pounds per week it takes a calorie deficit of 1000 calories. If exercise alone were used to create a deficit it would take about 4 hours of daily walking or approximately 2 hours of running.

Principle #3: The best diet to maintain weight loss is a low fat diet.

Many different types of diets will result in weight loss, however, the most successful diet to maintain lost weight is a diet with less than 20% of total calories from fat.

Principle #4: Once weight is lost, the body needs fewer calories to maintain that new set point. To avoid regain of body fat, approximately 60 to 90 minutes of exercise is needed each day.

While it may seem that weight loss is all about deprivation, I'm sure the Healthy Weight Journal participants would be quick to point out the benefits and some pleasant surprises. Fresh wholesome food tastes great compared to the grab and go meals purchased at the gas station or a fast food restaurant. Home cooking is an enjoyable process and a fun way to socialize. Exercise? Not work, it becomes a time for reflection and relaxing. Maintaining a healthy weight is more than a diet; it is a way of life.