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HOW TO STICK TO A DIET

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Find out what's gnawing you. Then by following this expert's rules you can conquer that yen for blubber-building calories

THE TOUGHEST THING about reducing is sticking to it. Dr. Norman Jolliffe, one of the leading authorities on diet and nutrition, reports that one of his patients lost some 500 pounds, and was still overweight. She lost pounds, and then gained them back, again and again.

Doctors estimate that over 30,000,000 people in America today are overweight, and that at one time or another most of them attempted to diet, unsuccessfully. So, since overeating is without doubt the major factor in overweight, the important question to them is why they do so.

All do not overeat for the same reason. In some, it is simply a matter of habit and conditioning to the pleasures of the table. In many, however, it can be traced to psychological factors.

To such persons food is often a vicarious means of obtaining emotional satisfaction. For them, it has become a symbol, a kind of emotional "input" similar to the satisfaction that can be derived from receiving love, admiration, recognition, attention or praise. When the going gets rough they automatically reach "for a sweet instead of a solution" to their problems.

For others, food may symbolize strength and security, and the resulting overweight may give them a feeling of superiority through being "big" or "bigger" than others.

A ravenous attack on food may similarly symbolize hostility. In other words, devouring a meal may very well be a 20th-century substitution for devouring one's minor enemies.

Overeating may also serve as a means of punishing oneself. It may mask a feeling of sadness or depression which comes to the surface when the diet is too severe or too prolonged. Here food symbolizes the "good mama" of early infant

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cy; and stopping its intake becomes equivalent to being unloved or unwanted.

In other instances, food and the resulting obesity may represent an impregnable wall of defense. For example, a young woman might wish for marriage, a home and children, but deep down she may be frightened and as yet unprepared for its responsibilities. Her overweight serves as a buttress which shields her from social activities and the possibility of meeting a likely mate.

In cases where the emotional problems are sufficiently severe, expert psychiatric guidance may be indicated. But in those with fair emotional stability, much can be accomplished by an all-out attempt to help oneself through increased self-understanding.

The first step in a sound reducing program is therefore to discover why you are overeating. For two weeks keep a diary. On one side of the page list "What I Eat," and on the other side "What's Eating Me." After a while, a pattern should emerge. You may discover, for instance, that whenever you run into difficulties in the office you tend to break your diet with a high-calorie dessert.

Be on the lookout for feelings of anger, especially when this powerful emotion is not expressed openly. An excessive need to please others, for example, may prevent you from adequately expressing hostility or anger, even under quite justifiable circumstances.

Understanding that certain unpleasant emotional feelings are causing your excess appetite will not make you feel less "hungry," but it

should make you more capable of breaking a pattern of eating that has been almost a reflex action.

The second step is to give yourself a real motivation to reduce. Too many people unknowingly put obstacles in their way because they want to reduce for the wrong reasons. Take, for example, the young girl who decides to lose weight so that she can attract a husband. This goal is a possibility since she would become more attractive through weight reduction; but if it is not accomplished after a reasonable weight loss, the resulting emotional reaction may easily cancel out all of the losses in a short period of self-pity or loneliness.

A realistic goal would be for her to seek to lose weight to improve her physical and emotional state; a husband may eventually be acquired, but this should be considered as a bonus rather than as the primary goal.

Ask yourself why you want to lose weight and make sure your answer is a sensible one. If you want to reduce because you will feel better, or, say, take an extra load off your heart and blood pressure apparatus, that's fine. But don't plan and count on having all of your problems solved and your life transformed.

The third step is to set up a reasonable goal in pounds. Don't plan to lose an enormous amount of weight all at once, for you will be putting an undue strain on both your body and mind.

Suppose, for example, you want to lose a total of 50 pounds. Instead of thinking of the time and deprivations necessary for this distant achievement, break it up into stages.

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Try to lose 20 or 25 pounds during a two- to three-month period. Let your weight stabilize for a few weeks at this level before you proceed the rest of the distance.

You will feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when you reach this new level, and it will encourage you to go further. And doing it in stages gives your body a chance to adjust more gracefully. But it should be borne in mind that action must be taken at the first sign of increasing weight.

The fourth step is to realize that it is quite normal to break a diet.

A one- or two-day orgy of eating will still permit you to get back to your overall plan without permanent damage. Unfortunately, many dieters oscillate and vacillate between the two extremes of rabbit fodder and pie-à-la mode. This type of dieter gets on the scale three or four times a day and is disappointed when there is no loss—despite the fact that ordinary arithmetic should warn him that a loss of ten pounds a month is difficult to measure at four-hour intervals.

One of the most common obstacles that faces the dieter is social custom. Food has always been a symbol of friendship, and hostesses frequently take it as a personal affront when guests fail to gorge themselves at their dinner or cocktail parties. The dieter is often faced with the “either-or” alternative of maintaining his diet at all odds, or antagonizing his hostess.

A good plan in handling this type of situation is to realize that the hostess too has needs to be fulfilled—her needs are to feed her guests and to be a good provider. She may be forceful, but can be handled with

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a reasonable degree of firmness and courtesy.

But even if you do weaken a bit and succumb to a few extra calories, as most people do on such occasions, this should not be the signal for a complete abandonment of the weight reduction program. If you can indulge on occasion and still return to the diet, it will have been a much greater triumph than to compulsively deny yourself the pleasures of food at all times.

The fifth step in successful weight reduction is to choose a sensible diet. Nobody can live on a few shreds of lettuce, a grated carrot and two ounces of boiled asparagus a day, and nobody has to resort to such rigorous tactics.

Diets that severely restrict food intake may have value for a few days, to meet an emergency situation such as a tight evening gown before an impending social function, but have no value in long-term plans. Fad diets, similarly, have no real permanent value since they accomplish nothing as far as permanent dietary re-education is concerned. The appeal of these diets lies only in their being bizarre; they cater to the need for the "magic gimmick" and enable the overweight person to resort to magical thinking rather than facing the obvious and painful truth that a radical change in eating habits is the only possible solution.

A sensible diet is one which closely resembles normal eating patterns. It should be one you can stay on indefinitely, without fear of depriving your body of vital foodstuffs.

Successful weight reduction is unquestionably a battle against odds. To emerge victoriously, the dieter

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must learn calorie values; which foods he must avoid, which are low in calories and still satisfying.

His diet must be an adequate one; one that is balanced in that it meets mineral and vitamin requirements. It should contain adequate proportions of carbohydrate, protein and fat. Appetite-appeasement drugs may have value in getting a start, but they should not be self-prescribed, since side effects and overdosage can produce results far more pernicious than obesity itself.

Most important, the overweight person must understand and tackle the emotional problems that so frequently lie at the very roots of his obesity. In many instances this can be accomplished by an increased knowledge of oneself; and this insight may provide not only the motivation but also an increased self-tolerance that permits reasonable goals and a less perfectionistic approach.

Medical help may be necessary, since marked obesity is difficult to cure and often cannot be solved by oneself. But no matter what the method, the problem can be corrected only by a permanent change in eating habits. If this is accomplished, overweight is most assuredly curable.