

Lessons About Weight Loss

By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author

Being a dietitian who has led thousands of nutrition and cooking workshops, I hear a lot about people's weight loss journeys. There isn't a diet out there that someone in my audience hasn't tried: ketogenic, cabbage soup, liquid, starvation, Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig, paleo, raw, Atkins, intermittent fasting, carb cycling, whole 30 and on and on. Sometimes it feels like there are more diets than there are people to follow them.

Within all the weight loss stories I hear, there is a trend and the dialog goes something like this:

Participant: "The (insert diet here) was very successful for me, I was able to lose 35 pounds in six months. It was the best diet I have ever been on. I felt amazing, my cholesterol improved, my energy was better."

Me: "And then what happened?"

Participant: "I gained the weight back"

Me: "Do you think the diet was successful?"

Participant: "Yes, the diet was successful, but I lost my willpower"

The story is almost always the same with small variations: the diet worked wonders, but the person failed. The truth is, if you lose weight on the diet and then gain the weight back when you go off the diet, it was the function of the diet that failed, not you. "Diets" are short term and not ways of living for life. They are not designed to fuel your body nutritiously or your soul spiritually. They are solely designed to help you lose weight and the companies that market them make lots of money!

The National Weight Control Registry, a non-profit organization that keeps track of successful weight loss stories considers a person successful when they have lost weight and kept it off for at least a year. But, let's step back and ask ourselves, first of all, do I really need to diet? Do I really need to lose "x" pounds? Who says so? Do I have to for health or medical reasons or do I want to because "Madison Avenue," the diet industry, and others say I should? There are many studies that show that the stress and emotional turmoil diets create can be more unhealthy for dieters than the extra weight they may carry (up to a point).

MIIA Wellness takes a more "weight neutral" approach and strives to promote health and wellbeing at any age and size. Of course, there are definite times when weight loss is definitely warranted, and you can discuss this with your physician or registered dietitian.

If you do choose to lose weight, there are several tips that will set you up for what I consider to be true success: maintaining a healthy weight for YOU **over time** by living a healthy lifestyle.

Here is what I have learned from my own journey maintaining a 45-pound weight loss and others who I have spoken to:

- 1) **Permanent diet change** – I can't think of anyone I have met who was successful at permanent weight loss without making a permanent change in their diet. I was able to lose my weight by eating a modified version of the Mediterranean Diet. The Mediterranean Diet is considered the best diet for losing weight AND keeping it off. It is also a way of eating that is delicious and satisfying and easy to follow forever. Whatever way of eating you chose, make sure it is something you will be able to do for the long term. If you are suffering through a diet, stop, it isn't going to work!
- 2) **Movement** – Some say you can lose weight by just changing what you eat, but I haven't met many who have done that. Finding some form of daily movement that you enjoy and will actually do every day is key. I also find that if I don't exercise in the morning, chances are almost 100% that I won't be exercising that day. A combination of cardio and weight bearing/strength training is best for weight loss.
- 3) **New Ways to Deal with Stress** – I am an emotional eater and many of the people I know are emotional eaters as well. When we eat because of a stressful situation, we tend to overeat and often not eat the best of foods (candy bars, pizza and ice cream come to mind). Dealing with your stress in other ways is key to stop you from emotional eating. The people I know who have been most successful with this use things such as mindfulness, breath work, yoga and exercise to decrease stress. If you are feeling like eating when you are stressed, and you know you are going

to do it, then you might consider some healthier comfort foods.

- 4) **Do It with Others** – Hang out with people who will support you and who you can also support. I go hiking with friends every week. If I didn't plan this into my week regularly, I probably wouldn't do it on my own. I also try to have one Mediterranean meal every week that my friends and I make together. Many of the successful weight loss people I talk to have accomplished their goals with the help of others.
- 5) **Set a Goal that Will Help You Stay on Track** – Many people set weight loss as their only goal. From my experience, you will set yourself up for success when you set a non-weight loss goal, one that will help keep you on track. While I was losing weight, for example, I set a goal to complete a triathlon. This kept me motivated to exercise for the 6 months before the triathlon. I also ate better, because I knew that how I ate would affect how I felt while exercising.

I am well aware that maintaining a healthy weight is not always an easy venture. I hope these tips are helpful! Good luck with your health and wellness efforts and let me know if you have any questions!

