

## Diets do not Work: Try a Different Approach to Weight Loss

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Are you one of those people who has tried every diet known to mankind, only to lose weight and then regain every pound—and maybe even a couple more? Maybe you repeatedly try the same “diet” over and over again, but always gain weight when you are off your “diet”;

I have four simple words for you: Diets do not work. This statement is supported by research from UCLA published in the journal *American Psychologist* in early 2007, which showed that dieters who stick with a diet for six months are able to drop 5 to 10 per cent of their weight, but 33 to 66 per cent put the weight back on—and usually some extra pounds—within four to five years.

There are many reasons why “diets” work initially but end up backfiring. First and foremost, diets are short term, which means that weight loss is short term. One of the reasons for the short life span of diets is that foods, or even whole food groups, are eliminated. This makes it unrealistic to stick to a diet for life. I could continue with the laundry list of reasons why diets do not work, but I will spare you the details. From my perspective, the biggest reason that diets fail is because they do not take into account the emotional aspects of food and human behavior. The following is a list of tips to help you develop lifestyle changes to support weight loss and overall health.

- Examine your relationship with food. Do you eat because you are physically or emotionally hungry? Do you use food to make you feel better when you are sad, bored, stressed out, etc.? If you use food for comfort, make a list of other activities that make you feel good. Examples may include reading, dancing, knitting, writing, playing with a pet, calling a friend, etc. Keep the list with you and use it next time you have the urge to eat when you are not physically hungry.
- Identify specific behaviors that are sabotaging your efforts to lose weight. We each have behaviors that we could improve to make ourselves healthier. Usually these behaviors are the ones we need to change to make ourselves a few pounds lighter as well. Ask yourself, “What is one thing that I can do to be healthier and/or lose weight?” For example sake, let’s pretend the behavior is a daily Venti Mocha with whole milk and extra whip cream from Starbucks.
- Set specific goals. Once you have identified a behavior that can be altered, create an action plan by setting specific goals. An example of an unspecific goal is “cut down on calories from Starbucks”. A more specific goal is “choose a small non-fat mocha with no whip cream instead of a Venti Mocha with whole milk and extra whip cream”.
- Modify your environment to support your goals. Try to avoid tempting situations and surround yourself with positive people who support you. If you pass Starbucks every morning and find your car pulling into the drive through, consider an alternate route to work, school, etc.
- Eliminate negative thinking. If you drink a your original Venti mocha with whip cream one day, forgive yourself and continue with your healthier choice the next day. Focus on the positive things that you have done instead of telling yourself that you are “weak” or have “no willpower”. Negative feelings can be very damaging to weight loss efforts and overall health.
- Exercise. Numerous studies show that exercise is essential for maintaining a healthy weight. Additionally, exercise is vital for good health. In order to maintain an exercise routine, choose an activity that is fun. Dancing is a great way to get moving!

Best wishes for a happy and healthy 2008!

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