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## Win the Weight Game By Saying NO to Diets!

Each year Americans spend more than \$30 billion on dieting. For decades people have been popping diet pills, drinking diet sodas, eating fat-free foods, and following fad diets in record numbers. And still, as a nation, we are getting fatter and fatter. Although some folks are able to lose weight by dieting, few are able to maintain that loss over time. Research indicates that 95% of the weight lost through “dieting” is regained within five years, and most gain back more than they lose.

It has become clear to many health care professionals that the current treatment methods for obesity are not working, and perhaps are making the problem worse. Many individuals are on a vicious cycle of trying one diet after another, losing weight, regaining, and feeling like a total failure. In our “diet to be thin” *crazed* society, people are often trying to reach a weight that is unrealistic in terms of their body frame and build. In addition, their overall health and self-esteem are harmed as a result of constantly “dieting”. Thus, it is logical to ask: If diets do not result in sustainable weight loss, it is advisable to promote them for everyone?

A growing number of health and fitness professionals say the answer is “no”. They maintain that lifestyle factors often have more impact on overall health than weight. Their views are supported by research, and a new way of managing weight has emerged from these findings: *the non-diet approach*.

Moving away from a “dieting” to the “non-dieting” philosophy is complex and challenging. It is something that doesn’t happen overnight, but is a process of *reprogramming* your way of thinking. This takes much time and effort. The first step in moving away from diets is challenging the “*diet mentality*”, including **false beliefs and misconceptions** such as:

- It is impossible to be fit **and** fat at the same time.
- **All** large people **must** lose weight in order to improve their health and fitness level.
- **All** large people are in poor health.
- Everyone can lose weight **if** they just follow the “proper” diet and exercise program.
- The main reason people regain lost weight is **their** failure to comply with prescribed diets and to make

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## Win the Weight Game (cont.)

long-term commitments to weight loss.

The ***non-diet approach*** is based on common sense and supported by increasing scientific evidence. There are four basic concepts that are essential to adopting this new *non-diet* approach to weight management:

- 1) Focus on total overall health rather than weight loss or achieving a specific "ideal weight".
- 2) Focus on the pleasure of eating, based on

internal cues of hunger and fullness, rather than external food plans or diets.

- 3) Focus on the joy of movement, encouraging all physical activities rather than prescribing a specific routine of regimented exercise.
- 4) Focus on self-acceptance and respect for the diversity of body sizes and shapes, rather than the pursuit of an idealized weight at all

costs.

Adopting a *non-diet* approach offers a new philosophy for weight management and new ways to help individuals optimize their health and well-being. The goal for all should be a healthful lifestyle that can be maintained indefinitely, rather than a short-term "diet". (Adapted from "Moving Away From Diets" by L. Zimmerman & V. Nichols, Nutrition Specialists)

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## What Your Daughter Reads Can Affect Her Body Image

Dieting is common behavior for girls as young as 10 years of age, according to study results that suggest efforts to prevent eating disorders should not overlook pre-adolescents. Recent research of 10-year-old Girl Scouts measured the incidence of dieting and asked girls about their exposure to various magazines and their awareness of the influence of the media.

In terms of their internalization of sociocultural ideals, over 25 percent of the girls agreed that: "Pictures of thin girls and women make me wish I were thin" and "I wish I looked like a magazine model" while far more of the Girls Scouts, nearly 60 percent, agreed that: "I do not want to look like models in magazines."

The Girls Scouts reported high levels of awareness of the media's influence, with over 75 percent agreeing that advertisements influence people's thoughts and behaviors. "They were more likely to read magazines like American Girl and Girls Life, which tend to promote healthy body image, than magazines like Seventeen, which amplify cultural norms regarding thinness," according to researchers. However, Girl Scouts are probably not representative of all girls and therefore, parents should review magazines and other media sources their pre-teen and teenage daughters are reading.

# Use Strength Training to Maintain a Healthy Weight

Are you finding it harder to zip up your favorite jeans? Does a blouse size that fit fine for years suddenly seem too small? Is it more difficult to move furniture when vacuuming? Do you often feel tired and out of energy? These are typical laments of “midlife” women. But weight gain and a lower energy level in your 40’s and 50’s does not have to be inevitable.

According to Miriam Nelson, Ph.D., physical fitness researcher at Tuft’s University, and author of “Strong Women Stay Young”, beginning in our mid-30’s, we start losing a third of a pound of muscle tissue each year. That muscle tissue is generally replaced with an equal amount of fat. This results because we keep eating the same number of calories, but fail to preserve muscle tissue by exercising. Thus, the pounds pile on as fat.

Muscle is a high-maintenance tissue that uses (burns) more calories, while fat tissue takes little energy to sustain itself. As our body ages, it experiences a steady decline in muscle tissue, which results in a sluggish metabolism by midlife. This makes it much easier to gain weight. Less muscle also makes it more difficult for us to lift and tote, and do physical tasks. We end up moving slower and less often, and begin feeling more sluggish and tired.

Physical activity burns calories, preserves and builds muscle tissue. The calorie-burning effect persists long after the exercise session has ended. More muscle boosts your metabolism and your calorie-burning capacity.. Aerobic activities like walking are important, but the most efficient way to gain muscle tissue is through strength training. Dr. Miriam Nelson’s research found that women can increase their metabolism by 15% with strength training alone. And the good news is that it’s possible to gain muscle at any age. It is never too late to change your shape and improve your health. Previous research indicated even women in their 90’s can benefit.

You may be thinking “this sounds like too much work!” Nelson would be the first to say, “any amount of exercise is

better than none”! Her research, however, indicates just 30 minutes of strength training two or three times a week is needed for best results. The key to success is to start slowly with lighter weights and build up gradually. Round out your fitness routine with 30 minutes of aerobic activity most days of the week.

Not only will your clothes fit better, you’ll feel less stressed and more energized. Strength training boosts your self-esteem, helps you sleep better, and feel stronger. In addition to her book, Nelson produced a video by the same name, “Strong Women Stay Young”, which takes you step by step through at basic weight training session. For more information on strength training for women, visit Miriam Nelson’s website, [www.strongwomen.com](http://www.strongwomen.com)

## Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A

**Q:** I’m like lots of women, I have tried nearly every diet that comes along with little success. I lose weight, but then I gain it back, plus some extra inches. I get so discouraged and down on myself. How can I get more information on this “non-diet” approach? It sounds interesting, and I know from experience that “dieting” does not work for me.

**A:** University Outreach & Extension offers a short course entitled “A New You: Living in a Healthy Body” that introduces the non-diet approach to weight management, and helps individuals optimize their health and well-being. The program includes four 2-hour sessions, and focuses on Appreciating Yourself & Others; Eating Well; and Active Living. For more information on upcoming classes, contact Lynda Johnson, Nutrition Specialist at 660-584-3658, or email [johnsonl@missouri.edu](mailto:johnsonl@missouri.edu).

## Set a Goal for Success

The secret to success in many aspects of life, whether financial success or weight loss, is setting realistic goals. The first step is simply to take the time to think about what it is you want to accomplish.

Setting a goal is like picking a destination for a trip. Unless you know where you want to go, you might as well just hop in your car and drive around for two weeks. Deciding on your goal helps you plan the roads you need to take to get to your destination.

A key factor in reaching any goal is to **WRITE IT DOWN**. Once you see it in black and white, it becomes more real. And your commitment to follow through becomes stronger. Do you want to reduce your cholesterol level by a certain number? Are you working to include a certain amount of exercise into your weekly schedule? Is your goal to fit into last summer's swim suit? Whatever the goal, take the time to write it down.

Another important aspect to reaching any goal is to break the larger goal down into manageable steps.

Perhaps your "getting in shape" goal can be made more specific, such as exercising a certain number of minutes at least four days a week. Set up some short term goals that you can work on right away, which will get you started in the right direction. Start with small, easily attainable goals and work your way up.

Want another tip to help make sure you reach your goal? Simply tell someone else. The act of sharing that information with another person often makes the goal seem more "official."