

Diet & Lifestyle Recommendations to Manage Weight

DAWN HARRIS SHERLING M.D.

Doctors lament that patients “just want an easy fix.”

Patients complain that their doctors “just want to write a prescription.”

Medical society guidelines say we should work on “diet and lifestyle” before reaching for medication and surgery.

So, if we all agree that we should be working on “diet and lifestyle” to manage our weight (at least initially), why don’t we?

“It doesn’t work.”

“Patients don’t have the time.”

“Doctors don’t have the time.”

All of which are only partially right, or really, mostly wrong.

Lifestyle changes can work, we just have to know which ones to give our energy to.

Patients don’t have the time, except that going to the doctor generally requires a half day off from work, and feeling unwell takes up a whole bunch of time that might be better spent elsewhere.

Doctors also don’t have the time, but if we could communicate effective advice quickly and easily, it might wind up ultimately saving time.

So, let’s stop talking about what we ought to be doing and lay out a plan for doing it.

Here goes 

Diet & Lifestyle Recommendations to Manage Weight

DAWN HARRIS SHERLING M.D.

#1 Eat food that isn't ultra-processed. Briefly, ultra-processed foods are foods that are packaged and generally contain ingredients that you can't picture in nature. Ultra-processed foods also usually contain various additives and emulsifiers (see page 3). It doesn't matter if it says "organic" or "natural" on the container. Nearly 60% of what we eat is ultra-processed and people who eat ultra-processed vs. whole foods were found to gain about a pound a week.* That's a lot. If you just do one thing, not eating ultra-processed foods is the thing to do.

#2 If you need a more prescriptive plan, consider the Mediterranean Diet or any diet that emphasizes whole foods—Paleo, Whole-30, and modified Keto Diets do, but they tend to be really restrictive. When a recent study compared Mediterranean with Keto, both groups lost weight, but the Mediterranean Diet folks actually got to enjoy what they were eating (and their cholesterol was better)! +

#3 Make sure you are getting enough protein. And yes, that can be plant-based. How much is enough protein? Well, if you are losing weight, you are going to lose muscle along with fat. To try to conserve muscle mass, there are complicated calculations you can do, but basically, 1.5 grams of protein per kilogram of what you weigh a day is a good way to go (stopping at 200 grams total). A kilogram is 2.2 pounds. So, if you weigh 200 pounds, 135 grams would be a good amount of protein for you to shoot for. But don't get hung up on the math. Between 100-150 grams of protein a day is a good amount in general. And it should come from whole foods. Protein powders and bars and shakes are generally ultra-processed. See tip #1.



Diet & Lifestyle Recommendations to Manage Weight

DAWN HARRIS SHERLING M.D.

#4 Speaking of muscle, working on strength-training exercises is vitally important in weight management. Muscle and fat are both hormone-producing organs, telling us to eat or not to eat. Changing our ratio of fat to muscle helps with weight. The only way to build muscle is to exercise. A recent study found that there's no way to be healthy without eating healthy AND exercising.** Even 15 minutes a day, two or three days a week can make a difference—this can be as simple as push-ups and squats, but there has to be some resistance (your own body weight as resistance is fine).

#5 Other things like getting enough sleep and stress reduction can help with weight management too, but for many of us, that's a lot easier said than done. Work on the first 4 items above and if you can find the time to sleep more and do things that help reduce stress, please do it. And if you can't, don't feel guilty—you are doing a lot already!

The key to making changes (and being able to stick with them) is to do them one step at a time. Start with cutting out the ultra-processed foods. Go through your kitchen and get rid of ultra-processed foods. Try to make your own food as much as you can. Restaurants serve A LOT of ultra-processed stuff, even the fancy, expensive ones. The more food you eat that looks like what it did when it came out of the ground (or off the animal—sorry vegetarians), the better you are eating and managing your weight.

More Resources: DawnHarrisSherling.com

Emulsifiers & Additives to Avoid:

Acacia gum, agar-agar, carrageenan, cellulose, cellulose gum (carboxymethylcellulose), carob bean gum, di- and mono-glycerides, high fructose corn syrup, gellan gum, glycerol, guar gum, inulin (chicory root fiber), locust bean gum, maltodextrin, mannitol, modified (fill-in-the-blank) starch, polysorbate 60 or 80, sorbitol, soy or sunflower lecithin, stevia, sucralose, titanium dioxide, xanthan gum, xylitol

Importantly: You do not have to avoid foods in which some of these substances occur naturally. Cellulose, when in whole fruits and vegetables, is great. But if you see these listed in ingredient lists, best to put the item back on the shelf.



Diet & Lifestyle Recommendations to Manage Weight

DAWN HARRIS SHERLING M.D.

References:

* Hall KD, Ayuketah A, Brychta R, et al. Ultra-Processed Diets Cause Excess Calorie Intake and Weight Gain: An Inpatient Randomized Controlled Trial of Ad Libitum Food Intake [published correction appears in Cell Metab. 2019 Jul 2;30(1):226] [published correction appears in Cell Metab. 2020 Oct 6;32(4):690]. Cell Metab. 2019;30(1):67-77.e3. doi:10.1016/j.cmet.2019.05.008

+ Gardner CD, Landry MJ, Perelman D, et al. Effect of a Ketogenic Diet versus Mediterranean Diet on HbA1c in Individuals with Prediabetes and Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus: the Interventional Keto-Med Randomized Crossover Trial [published online ahead of print, 2022 May 31]. Am J Clin Nutr. 2022;nqac154. doi:10.1093/ajcn/nqac154

**Ding D, Van Buskirk J, Nguyen B, et al. Physical activity, diet quality and all-cause cardiovascular disease and cancer mortality: a prospective study of 346 627 UK Biobank participants [published online ahead of print, 2022 Jul 10]. Br J Sports Med. 2022;bjsports-2021-105195. doi:10.1136/bjsports-2021-105195

This handout is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to serve as a substitute for professional medical advice. The author of this handout and operator of the website specifically disclaim any and all liability arising directly or indirectly from the use of any information contained in this handout. A health care professional should be consulted regarding your specific medical situation. Any product mentioned in this handout does not imply endorsement of that product by the author or website operator.

More Resources: DawnHarrisSherling.com