What's the best way to lose weight? While there's not a magic diet, pill, wrap or machine that will make your body fat do a disappearing act - there is a solution. Regular exercise plus low-fat, high nutrition eating habits will for most of us, get the extra weight off and keep it off - permanently.

Why diets fail

Research tells us that few people exercise enough and that many are considered overweight (or more precisely overfat). In fact, overall, Canadians have put on a few pounds since 1985. Of adults slightly from 54 per cent in 1985. Yet 81 per cent of overweight Canadians acknowledged that losing weight would improve their health.

The problem is that many people lose weight and then gain it back over time. This cycle of "yo-yo" dieting changes the metabolism making it harder to lose weight and easier to gain it back each time you go through the lose-gain cycle. Because losing and regaining weight is discouraging, motivation must be high if you intend to successfully achieve long lasting weight control.

The role of exercise

Exercise can do many things for you in terms of weight loss. Studies show that it is the single most consistent factor in successful weight loss. Unfortunately, many overweight people don't believe they can perform the amount of exercise necessary to make a difference in their weight loss efforts. But any amount of exercise can be helpful in losing weight as it: burns calories, may help suppress your appetite when done before a meal, uses calories from fat while sparing lean body mass (muscle).

Counteracts the decline in basal metabolic rate that occurs with dieting. It actually revs up your metabolism so that, even after exercise, your body continues to burn extra calories. Your basic metabolic rate (BMR), or the rate at which you burn calories, may stay at the increased level for hours after you finish exercising.

Both aerobic exercise and resistive strength training play an important role in weight loss. Aerobic exercise burns fat for its primary fuel source while leaving lean muscle tissue. And strength training increases your lean body mass, or muscle, which burns calories more effectively than fat.

The bottom line is that physical activity increases energy expenditure. Increasing energy expenditure through exercise by 250 calories a day would be equal to about one pound of weight loss every two weeks in most people, given food intake remains the same. Therefore,

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exercise assists in the creation of negative energy balance and, hence, long term weight loss.

A weight control plan

1. Get started. First try to see yourself differently - there's a thinner you wanting to break through. Go ahead - you can do it!

2. Know how much to lose. Find out what your ideal weight range is by using a weight table or formula and taking into consideration your frame size. Then, set your target weight loss goal. If you can, get your body composition assessed. This will give you a better understanding of your body's muscle to fat relationship. Most importantly, give yourself adequate time to reach your objectives keeping in mind that safe and effective weight loss should not exceed 1 to 2 pounds per week.

3. Keep records. Record your eating and exercise habits to help determine your present patterns. Keeping records can also help you chart your weight loss programs.

4. Substitute behavior. Once you recognize your old patterns, you can substitute new positive behavior for your old unwanted ones. Select an enjoyable form of exercise that is also convenient. Aerobic conditioning such as walking, cross-country skiing, cycling and rowing burn significant calories and have the added

benefit of improving your general fitness level.

5. Balance eating and exercise. Balance the calories you take in (eating) with the calories you burn off (exercise). Striking a balance helps maintain your ideal weight.

As you can see, the evidence in favor of exercise is clear and powerful. Appropriate exercise offers a variety of methods for modifying the energy balance equation and contributes to improved physical and psychological health. This weight loss paradox requires a balanced approach to moderate lifestyle changes including alternative eating patterns and regular exercise. Make a commitment to a more healthy you by incorporating some of these tips into your daily routine and you will soon gain the health, energy, self-confidence and lean, trim body you have always wanted.

This information is provided by The National Exercise For Life Institute (NEFLI) based in the U.S. whose mission is to collect and disseminate information about the benefits of exercise in order to convince more people to undertake a program of regular exercise. For more information about exercise and weight loss, call The National Exercise For Life Institute at 1-800-358-3636, or write P.O. Box 2000, Excelsior, MN U.S.A. 55331-9967.

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