

Is It Time to Give Up Your Chronic Dieting?

Objective

To identify the ways that chronic dieting affects your life.

You Should Know

An estimated 45 million Americans go on diets each year. According to WebMD, even when people lose weight, up to 80 percent will gain it back. Many people say that they go on and off diets for much of their adult lives, which typically leads to frustration, low self-esteem, and even depression.

Chronic dieting contracts your world. If you create rules around eating to control your food intake and environment, you may avoid certain restaurants, events, activities, or even travel. Even your relationships may become limited as a byproduct of your chronic dieting. Chronic dieting translates to chronic failure which can obviously have a significant impact on your self-esteem. If you are always on a diet, you might be creating a constant state of “not being good enough” and you might believe that your happiness will only come in the future when you are the “right” weight.

Besides the psychological effects of chronic dieting, medical professionals also tell us that this type of lifestyle can result in serious health problems. So-called “yo-yo dieting” has been associated with muscle loss, an increase in body fat, and an increased risk of diabetes and heart disease.

Nutritionists generally agree that a much better approach to dieting is to simply adopt a healthy lifestyle, which includes nutritious eating, regular exercise, and learning healthy ways to deal with stress. Even the well-known weight loss company Weight Watchers has recently shifted its focus from its popular diet to an emphasis on healthy living, using the new tagline “Wellness That Works.”

This worksheet will help you examine how chronic dieting has affected your life. The statements and questions that follow will help you explore what might be preventing you from living a healthy lifestyle, finding self-acceptance, and permanently giving up chronic dieting.

What to Do

Check off the statements that are usually true for you.

- I avoid eating in social situations or avoid situations altogether if food is involved.
- I worry about what people think about my body or the way that I eat.
- I compare what I eat (quantity and type) to what other people eat.
- I eat differently when other people are present.
- I constantly worry about food and/or eating.
- I have strict rules about food and/or eating.
- I fantasize about food.
- I am preoccupied with thoughts about what I eat and foods I should avoid.
- I count calories, carbohydrates, fat grams, or other factors about food.
- Foods are either good or bad.
- I am afraid of feeling too full.
- I do not trust my body's cues.
- I feel guilt or shame if I eat "bad" foods.
- I worry that if I eat forbidden foods, I will lose control and be unable to stop eating.
- I experience mood swings because I delay eating.
- I binge eat or find myself eating large quantities of food.
- I avoid physical intimacy because I feel fat.
- I frequently discuss food, weight, or dieting.
- I ignore food rules when I am on vacation and eat more than I require, leading to feelings of shame or guilt.
- I exercise only to burn calories or lose weight.
- I overeat when I am upset or stressed.
- If I overeat, I compensate in some way (e.g., skipping meals, using laxatives, or purging).
- If I break my eating rules, I end up overeating later.
- I worry that I will not have enough to eat.
- I cannot determine when I am physically hungry or when I am satisfied (full).
- Dieting and/or food restriction causes me to be irritable.
- Even when I lose weight, I still feel too fat.
- I am constantly comparing myself to other people and how their bodies look.
- I hate myself when I lose weight and then gain it back.
- I tend to start the latest fad diet but soon lose my enthusiasm.

Now, count the number of items you checked off: _____

If you checked:

1-10 items - You have a slight problem with chronic dieting.

10-20 items - You have a moderate problem with chronic dieting.

20 or more items - This indicates that you have a significant problem with chronic dieting.

Reflections on This Exercise

What do you think would happen if you simply stop dieting? Describe your greatest fear.

Can you think of just one habit you could start today which would contribute to living a healthy lifestyle rather than one of chronic dieting?

We are all constantly bombarded by cultural messages that suggest we have to be thin to be happy. Make a statement that refutes this unrealistic cultural message.

How can you get support for replacing chronic dieting with a healthy lifestyle? Write down the names of people or organizations that could support your efforts.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?
