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WHEN YOU DECIDE TO LOSE WEIGHT, MOST OFTEN YOU THINK FIRST OF DIETS AND EXERCISE. AT LEAST AS IMPORTANT AS THESE, HOWEVER, IS HOW YOU APPROACH THE PSYCHOLOGY AND EMOTIONS OF LOSING KILOS.

**T**here are many complex theories when it comes to effective weight-loss strategies. An unfortunate common denominator between many of these theories is the irrational need to lose weight as quickly as possible. All too often, we allow ourselves to be seduced by promises of weight loss and fitness that don't adhere to a holistic approach. This is not necessarily an indictment on ourselves but simply clever marketing that probably appeals to the desires of a generally time-poor society.

Advertising has the potential to distort our self-perceptions and the way we perceive others. It is beneficial to distinguish between images that are a natural reflection of the real world and those which are superficial or fake. You need not use advertising as an accurate guide to your own body image, as there is no single ideal look — we are all unique in various ways and this is a good thing.

When you make the decision to shed a few kilograms it's beneficial to focus on the emotions that impact on overall health. There are various natural steps to a healthier lifestyle; these can be smoothly incorporated into your everyday activities and they may become easier to adapt to the more patient you are in striving toward the self-prescribed destination.

## DON'T STARVE

It's important that you don't deprive yourself of food. An adequate intake, and hence a dietary representation of each of the food groups, fuels the metabolism and helps maintain the immune system, assisting it to function properly. The deprivation, or complete avoidance of meals altogether, will inevitably lead to an unhealthy over-compensation at subsequent meals.

Another destructive form of depriving yourself occurs when you crave perceived "treat" foods and refrain altogether. Of course, allergies would be an exception to this, but if you deprive yourself on every single occasion and the temptation builds, your willpower is at risk of breaking down a little each time.

It's important to know your logical limits and needs regarding food, and it's fair to say these become clearer once they have been realistically defined and tested. What constitutes too much and what would be classed as not enough? It's important to find a healthy middle ground between limits and requirements and it's imperative to learn about which foods can provide your body with the nutrition it needs.

Interestingly, a natural manifestation of confidence that is gained gradually over the course of the journey to better health is a growing ability to trust your own choices and discretion.

On the occasion you do knowingly overstep the boundaries of moderation, there's no need to feel guilt about this. Instead of being overcome by guilt, the appropriate step is to become proactive in developing healthier habits, slowly but surely. There's no need for guilt, because weight gain develops over time, with its origins generally rooted in the habits you develop. Therefore, there's usually time to correct bad eating habits before they become entrenched in everyday life.

## CHARACTER ISN'T MEASURED IN KILOS

A reasonably paced walk (probably about 8-9 minutes per kilometre) is great for the cardiovascular system and an effective, natural method of clearing the mind. This is also something you can incorporate into your daily life.

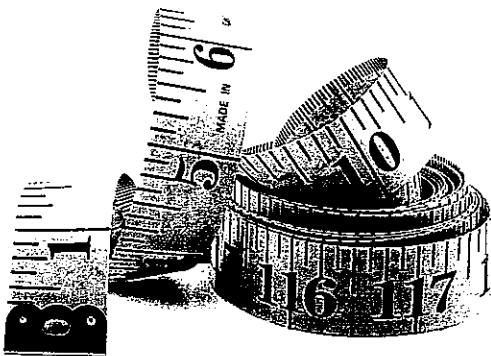
It's important to burn an adequate but sensible amount of calories. This is where it comes in handy to keep an eye on calorie intake — without obsessing, of course. To lose weight, you need to burn more calories than you consume. However, the more physical activity you undertake, the more fuel your body needs to maintain its natural functions.

Common emotional insecurities and the stresses of everyday life can lead to erratic eating behaviours. Popular culture often has surreal, digitally enhanced images of a perceived appropriate body shape. The reinforcement of these misleading messages and attitudes is, through advertising, intertwined with fictional lifestyles full of wealth, success and popularity. Although losing a certain number of kilograms could never guarantee these, it boosts confidence and contributes toward us being the best we can. The important thing is to be yourself and don't strive toward the superficial images we are often bombarded with.

You can't afford to measure your success or character by weight or weight loss.

Instead, it's more beneficial to focus on the positive habits gained and negative habits modified during the journey. At the end of the day, weight loss is about numbers, so how can you be given a designated number of kilograms to lose when we are all unique in our personalities and capabilities?

The idea is to not allow numbers to overshadow the main goal, which is fitness and health; the other goals can fit into place naturally. Having goals that are peripheral but not unrelated to weight loss helps →



## BODY weight loss

quite a lot because this lessens the risk of becoming disheartened if weight isn't shed as quickly as first expected. The more gradual your progress, the more sustainable the result.

### THE TRANSFORMATION

The key phrase is "lifestyle change" rather than "diet". This is a good way to approach your journey because, where the word diet used to simply mean our eating patterns, it has now unfortunately come to mean the restrictive modification of eating habits.

Weight loss is not always the most accurate reflection of fitness, as people come in all different shapes and sizes. It's important to be patient in achieving the desired result. You may notice little improvements, such as in your breathing and the way clothes fit. Smaller achievements like these all contribute to the bigger picture and enable a confidence which facilitates a reflection on your hard work, which in turn enables you to separate physical appearance from your true capabilities. You need to remember the importance of intrinsic qualities such as the logic, determination, heart, mind and soul that have been utilised in this

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Gradually substitute unhealthy foods you take comfort in with healthier alternatives.



lifestyle change.

Such a worthwhile transformation takes time and patience. It takes a certain period of time to develop negative habits regarding nutrition and exercise, so it will probably take time to rectify these and replace them with positive habits. Overstepping logically defined boundaries on "treat" foods a few times won't physically alter your body shape; however, it is important that you recognise habits before they become unhealthy or, worse, destructive.

### ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

When stepping on the scales, remember that the numbers that appear are just that — numbers; these aren't an accurate reflection of you as a whole. Those numbers don't account for unique and variable physical attributes; for example, some people may have a naturally large or muscular physique, and height is also an important variable in weight. We need reasonably defined guidelines on how often we expect to weigh ourselves because if we weigh ourselves too often, there's a risk of frustration and possible disenchantment with the journey if the self expectations are too demanding.

It probably varies from person to person but I found that weighing myself once every week or so enabled me to keep track of my progress. Some of us can't help but rely on

the scales as a measure of overall progress; that's fine as long as you take into account various biological factors that alter weight during different parts of the day. There is an unhealthy level of overweight but there's no doubting there's also a dangerous level of underweight.

You can slowly but surely reduce your reliance on the scales. If carrying perceivably extra weight, you can safely learn to alter the pattern of weighing yourself every single day. Some theories recommend daily weigh-ins and, of course, it depends on what you're comfortable with, but experience will teach you that, once you are ready, you'll be able to gradually reduce the frequency of stepping on the scales. In continuing to lose weight slowly but surely, you may find you won't rely on that feedback so much.

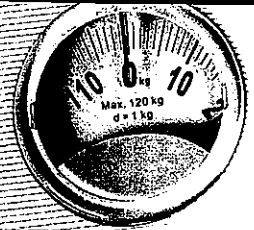
### FOOD SYMBOLISM

Although it's fine to identify particular foods as "treat" foods it's also important not to allow food to become a symbol of punishment and reward. If you allow this to happen, food becomes a dangerous weapon of control. You can positively channel control and monitor this: for example, you could perhaps alter the unhealthy foods you take comfort in and gradually learn to find and consume healthier alternatives such as yoghurt in preference to icecream that's high in sugar and saturated fat. You are more than capable of gradually reducing the intake of these "comfort foods", especially after identifying the reasons why you relied on them: were you hungry, stressed, angry, frustrated or tempted by the taste?

It's beneficial to make the decision to exercise regularly and to eat for the right reasons — the reasons why you eat are as important as what you eat, as is the time of day when various foods are consumed.

### FEEDBACK

Remember the positive feedback you receive and take pride in this; being confident that you deserve that praise. Don't assume



### JUDGE NOT

The healthy lifestyle nurtures psychological wellbeing as well as attitudes towards exercise and nutrition. Your conscious decision to incorporate the healthy lifestyle into your daily routine shows great courage and initiative on your part. If a diet is viewed as unsuccessful, you need to view the diet — not you — as having failed. You can't afford to correlate unsuccessful dieting attempts with your character or integrity. It's important not to judge the character of yourself or others in kilograms. Nobody needs or deserves to be judged in that way. Your weight doesn't define the person you are.

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this necessarily means eating less and exercising even more will lead to greater praise, because nothing could be further from the truth in some cases. Although praise is a good thing, remember it's neither the end nor the means — it's wise to simply view it as a guide that you're perhaps on the right track.

You need to consider timely advice from trusted family and friends, and anyone else you are confident has your health and emotional wellbeing in mind. Try and be aware of a person's motives for making negative comments about physical appearance or body shape; learn to distinguish harsh frivolous insults from genuine expressions of concern. If a person appears to insult just to demean others, this is a negative aspect of their personalities, not our own. It's important to distinguish this from the constructive criticism that is common among family and friends and, hence they see in us a need to alter our lifestyles for the better; a need, perhaps, they fear we cannot see nor admit to.

### FINDING A BALANCE

Formulating a healthy lifestyle plan doesn't have to negate or override all other aspects of life. Your healthy lifestyle doesn't have to come at the expense of career, studies or social interactions. As time progresses, you can gradually improve at intertwining these various rites of passage. Of course, you may never completely perfect this art

**Don't expect to lose weight too quickly. The more gradual your progress, the more sustainable the result.**  
**Don't deprive yourself as this can lead to an unhealthy over-compensation at subsequent meals.**  
**The reasons why you eat are as important as what you eat.**  
**The key term is "healthy lifestyle" — this is something that can be maintained much longer than a restrictive "diet".**  
**Have goals that are peripheral to, but still complement, the weight-loss journey: gaining confidence for example.**  
**Remember that numbers on the scales aren't the only measure of progress.**



Enjoy nature and take in the scenery and its uniqueness.

of multitasking and time management, but a few modifications to your routine can be very beneficial. You may decide to walk part of the way to school, work or to meet friends where possible.

If you go to the shop to buy a paper on a Saturday morning, you can make the conscious decision to walk. Enjoy nature and take in the scenery and its uniqueness. Think before you jump in the car for a short trip. A nice walk will save the need to burn petrol; you also have to reverse out of the driveway and maybe get stuck in traffic and even be subjected to road rage when the shop is only a kilometre away. You may be pleasantly surprised to find a walk can provide motivation and focus for the whole day. It's all about balance. A good example would be combining exercise and relaxation, allowing sufficient time for each.

It's a good idea to avoid boredom because this often results in consuming unhealthy foods while your guard is down. Try finding constructive ways to deal with boredom, such as reading a book, exercising or playing sports.

If you've had a lengthy period of inactivity or only a small amount of exercise, there's no need to panic. You don't need to over-compensate — you just need to begin somewhere. A 15-minute walk twice or three times a week is a great start and your body

will let you know when to slightly increase the length and intensity of exercise.

It's important to consume three nutritious meals a day. If you find yourself needing a snack between meals, it's important to understand the nutritional statistics and significance of what you snack on before overdoing it. New and healthy foods don't always have a bland or dissatisfying taste, so it's wise to give healthy, untried foods a fair chance before deciding whether to incorporate these into your regular diet. At mealtimes, the importance of counterbalancing meats and slightly fattening foods with fresh vegetables or salads is undeniable. There are dozens of choices in the local supermarkets and remember that a lot of salads and vegetable can be acquired tastes.

Enjoy your food, and remember to acknowledge your hard work and exercise. Each small step throughout your journey deserves a pat on the back. Character isn't, and nor should it ever be, measured in kilos. Character is measured in the way you handle the obstacles and challenges life put before you. ☺

**John Fitzgerald is a writer and editor. Having successfully incorporated the healthy lifestyle into his own life, he believes in honest writing that's in touch with the real world.**