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Keeping it Off

Most people have to work at managing their weight and have successfully lost weight at one time or another. Many have lost weight numerous times. Some have lost a tremendous amount of weight during their lives. Unfortunately, few are consistently successful at keeping their lost weight off.

The most common approach to weight-loss maintenance is to sustain the approach that led to successful weight loss in the first place. This appears to be a reasonable tactic when weight loss occurs through healthy changes in behavior. However, if weight loss was accomplished through more extreme methods (e.g., liquid diet), sustaining such an approach isn't an option.

The current edition of the American Journal of Preventive Medicine contains an article which summarizes the results of a national survey in which 36 weight-control practices were examined to determine which were associated with successful weight loss, and which were associated with successful maintenance of weight loss. Several examples of the behavioral practices examined are drinking plenty of water, walking for exercise, thinking about progress made, and weighing oneself.

The study results indicate that the behaviors that contribute to weight loss aren't necessarily the same as those associated with weight-loss maintenance. In fact, only 8 of the 36 practices were related to both weight loss and weight loss maintenance. For example, whereas doing different kinds of exercises was associated with successful weight loss but not

maintenance, following a consistent exercise routine was not associated with successful weight loss but was associated with successful weight loss maintenance. Three other behaviors associated with weight loss maintenance but not initial weight loss were rewarding oneself for sticking to a diet or exercise plan, reminding oneself of why weight needs to be controlled, and eating plenty of low-fat sources of protein.

Other studies have examined behaviors associated with weight loss maintenance, but the uniqueness of the study described here is that it examined both weight loss and maintenance in the same investigation. These results certainly call into question the notion that maintaining weight loss involves sustaining the behaviors that lead to weight loss in the first place. Rather, this study suggests that the maintenance of weight loss may require different behaviors than those associated with initial weight loss.

By no means is this a perfect study but it may prove to be pivotal in addressing the problem of weight loss maintenance. In other realms it is known that the process of initiating a new behavior isn't the same as the process of maintaining behavior. Perhaps this is the case with weight control.

However, as noted above, there were 8 of 36 behaviors that were associated both with weight loss and successful maintenance of weight loss. These would certainly seem to be weight control behaviors to try to incorporate these into one's lifestyle. They are:

- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Limit the amount of carbohydrates eaten
- Control portion sizes
- Plan what to buy before going to the grocery
- Read nutrition labels
- Think about progress made
- Think about one's goal for a healthy weight
- Weigh yourself

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