



e-quilibrium

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Weight Gain Prevention

To state the obvious, it is easier to not become overweight in the first place than to lose weight after gaining excess pounds. Unfortunately, weight gain is nearly ubiquitous during adulthood, so that over time, most adults find themselves in the position of needing or wanting to lose weight at some point in their lives.

How does an adult keep from gaining weight? The simple answer is to not eat too much and to exercise enough. According to an analysis published last year in the New England Journal of Medicine (Dariush Mozaffarian et al.), there are even more specific steps a person can take to prevent unwanted weight gain.

The study examined three large cohorts of adults totaling over 120,000, following them for up to 20 years. These adults were not obese at baseline, nor did they have any chronic illnesses. At 4-year intervals, lifestyle behaviors and weight change were assessed.

On average, these adults gained 3.35 pounds every four years. Some specific foods, per serving per day, were associated with the following weight gains over four year periods: potato chips (1.69 lbs), potatoes (1.28 lbs), sugar-sweetened beverages (1.00 lb), unprocessed red meats (.95 lbs), and processed meats (.93 lbs). Per serving per day consumption of refined grains and sweets/desserts were associated with weight gains of .39 lbs and .41 lbs, respectively. On the other hand, some foods, per serving per day, were associated with weight loss: yogurt (-.82

lbs), nuts (-.57 lbs), fruits (-.49 lbs), whole grains (-.37 lbs), and vegetables (-.22 lbs).

The investigators also examined other lifestyle behaviors. Keeping a steady amount of physical activity over four year intervals was associated with no weight change, whereas increasing amounts of physical activity was associated with up to -1.76 lbs of weight loss. Slight amounts of weight gain were associated with either averaging less than 6 hours of sleep per night, or more than 8 hours per night. Television watching, per hour per day, was associated with .31 lbs of weight gain.

Precise energy intake and expenditure were not measured in these cohorts of adults, but nonetheless, the above trends were found in each of the three separate cohorts and were similar for women and men. For the most part, the results of this analysis are not surprising.

Indeed over a period of years, even small differences in habits can result in sizeable weight gains. However, the other side of this equation is encouraging, that is, that small differences in habits in the healthy direction can prevent weight gain.

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