

What we forget when it comes to weight loss

The Power of Focusing on *Healthy Behaviours,* No Matter your Size

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Do you have the goal of weight loss?

It is impossible to avoid the constant messages throughout our diet-obsessed culture, so most adults do believe that they should be a smaller weight in order to be healthier, or more worthy and even to be happier.

Over 80% of adults are actively trying to lose weight and/or dieting.

90% of mothers reported they had dieted recently

The desire to be thinner is more common in women and is showing to begin in younger and younger girls - even from the age of 5 years old!

Children whose mothers are dieting, are twice as likely to develop the desire for weight loss themselves and begin down the spiraling path of dieting.

Are you frustrated or confused about how difficult it is to achieve your goals?

Most people who have the desire for weight loss, report frustrations with achieving results.

Maybe there are factors making your weight loss pursuit difficult?

Are the messages and information out there confusing and you've lost confidence in what you're doing?

Maybe your goals and priorities need a bit of re-aligning?

What is optimal health anyway?

The World Health Organisation defines health as being 'not merely the absence of disease, but a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being.'

Well-being is about feeling comfortable, healthy and happy with life as a whole.

So, what are healthy behaviours?

The main behaviours that are known to optimise our health outcomes are:

- Balanced and mindful nutrition
- Regular exercise meeting the recommendations
- Effective stress management
- Adequate sleep
- Social connection
- Not smoking

Underneath each of these behaviour umbrellas, there are more specific behaviours also.

Why a goal of weight loss is not always helpful?

Getting caught up in a focus on changing body size, a **weight-loss focus**, typically results in some form of dieting behaviours and often weight-loss strategies and behaviours. These are often not consistent with balanced and mindful nutrition, effective stress management or long-term regular exercise.

But isn't body weight linked to health?

There is an **association** between health outcomes and body weight, but not a proven link. So, when people adopt healthy behaviours such as regular exercise and balanced nutrition they will have improved health AND may also experience weight loss at the same time. The association appears that as weight decreases, health improves. Research tells us, however that it's not the weight loss that causes the health improvements, it is more likely the behaviours. So yes, weight is linked with health, but it is NOT the weight change that causes the health changes.

So should we try to be a 'healthier' body size?

Absolutely focus on being a 'healthier' person (if you so wish...your body, your business...you chose what you want for your body!), but the questions are these, 'will I even be any 'healthier' if I lose weight?', Are the side effects of the pursuit of weight-loss worth it? Can I be healthier even if I do not lose weight, no matter what my body size is?' When there is so many negative impacts on physical and psychological well-being with 'trying' to lose weight, it becomes futile at best and dangerous at worst to focus on reducing body size. The healthiest body size is one which is stable and where you can undertake healthy behaviours.

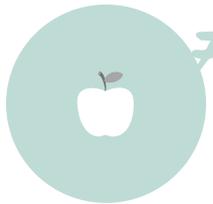
This weight-loss mindset can be extremely difficult to move away from though, with all of the diet culture and the 'thinner is better/more worthy/healthier' message we are bombarded with every day.

So lets look at the research that shows us:

- Behaviours have the biggest influence on health, not weight
- Diets are unlikely to work long-term
- There are consequences of weight-loss strategies
- A focus on adopting healthy behaviours will help get to the root of goals and challenges & will improve motivation and success

When we know the evidence we can make informed choices about our goal setting, mindset, focus and ultimately the behaviours we adopt.

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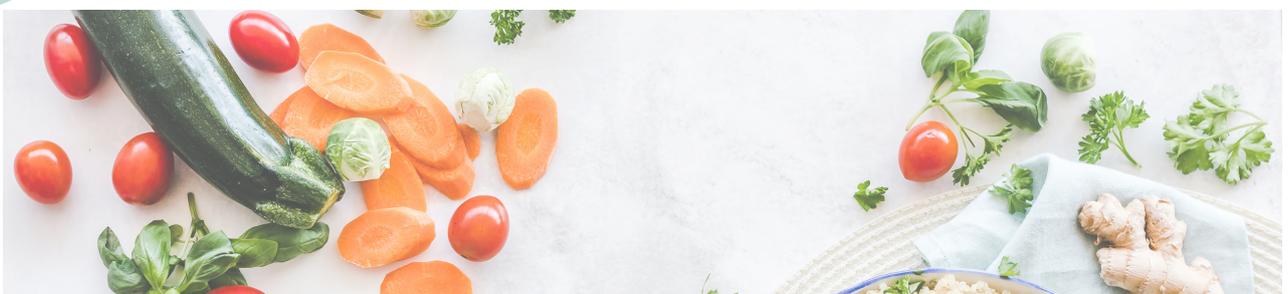


#4

Focus on healthy behaviours for better results and improved health



Goal-setting



#1

Behaviours have the biggest influence on health, not a particular body weight

Weight loss can occur without any health improvements

Weight-loss does not automatically mean healthier, no matter what size the body was to begin with. Infact, sometimes in the pursuit of weight-loss with good intentions for health, there is collateral damage.

Some of the behaviours undertaken on the mission of losing weight, are not consistent with balanced and mindful nutrition, effective stress management or long-term regular exercise. Dieting, cutting down on nutritious foods, disregarding true feelings of hunger and fullness, the increased stress and anxiety and the lower energy levels and desire for physical activity can mean that while someone is still losing weight, their health outcomes may not improve.

Health can be improved with or without weight changes

Some people in larger bodies are healthy, and some people in smaller bodies are unhealthy. Research shows consistently that healthy behaviours are much better at influencing health and well-being than weight alone is.

Some examples are:

- Quite a few really good quality research studies show very clearly that dietary quality and physical activity can prevent diabetes developing, independently of weight change. Whether weight changes or not, if there's diet quality and physical activity meeting the recommendations, diabetes can be prevented.
- People who are overweight or obese who do meet 3-4 hours of exercise per week have a significantly lower risk of mortality, compared to people of the same body size who do not meet those exercise recommendations. The exercise behaviour was more accurate at predicting the persons risk of mortality than their weight was.
- If someone is a normal weight, overweight or obese, and they all adopt the 4 min healthy behaviours (balanced nutrition, regular exercise, moderate alcohol and not smoke), they all have the same risk of mortality. So the weight of the person is not significant, but the adoption of healthy behaviours is.

Every body size and shape can improve health and well-being via healthier lifestyle behaviours whether or not weight loss occurs.

#2

Diets are unlikely to work long-term

Sure, with most diets there is initial short-term weight loss. Long-term maintenance (3-5 years+) of this weight loss remains elusive for most people though.

95% of dieters regain most of the initial weight lost within 1 year, and all of the weight lost within 5 years. Of those who regain the weight, 90% regain more weight than they initially lost, **meaning most people end up heavier than when they started.**

Research clearly shows that the most common outcome of a pursuit of weight loss or dieting, is weight gain!

The weight loss industry use the initial 'success' of weight loss to sell their products. They may even say 'clinically proven results' which may be true...for a short while. They show you the before and after photos...but we never see an after-after photo, or a photo of 2 or more years down the track!

This is because there is no diet that has proven results for most people beyond 2-5 years.

One study reported that 5 years after the group of women lost weight on a 6-month diet, they were weighing an average of 3.6kg heavier than before they started the diet.

There are psychological and physiological mechanisms put in place within the body when it senses restriction (such as dieting), all of which contribute to the phenomenon of weight regain after dieting.

- **The brain becomes preoccupied with food** - you think about food more often and notice your favourite foods around more
- **Taste buds change** - making a wider variety of foods seem appealing to you, so there will be an increase in the chances of you eating more. Changes also increase cravings for fatty foods as they provide more calories.
- **Appetite increases and less likely to feel full after eating** - The body produces less of the hormone that tells you you're full (leptin) and more of the hormones which make you feel hungry (ghrelin). These hormonal changes can last for a year or more post dieting even if you have regained the weight.
- **Loss of muscle mass** - muscle burns more energy and during dieting, the body attempts to conserve energy so reduces some muscle. Also there is often less protein eaten during dieting which does not support muscle conservation.
- **Increased fat storage** - body releases enzymes/hormones which increase fat storage and decrease the burning of fat when possible.
- **Metabolism slows down** - The body becomes more efficient and burns less calories to do the work it needs to. This decrease can be as much as 15% drop in daily calories burned, and this reduced rate remains in place for around 2 years after dieting - so significantly contributes to the weight-regain.
- **Less energy, desire and motivation to exercise** - during food restriction/dieting/weight loss, as part of trying to conserve energy, the body becomes more fatigued and consequently more likely to be less active over the day and skip exercise sessions. Dieters frequently report feeling very low on energy, lethargic and less motivated to exercise.

#3

There are consequences of weight loss strategies

1. Yo-yo dieting & weight cycling

We know that diets most often result in weight regain, often plus some --> this drives people into restriction/dieting etc again --> some initial weight loss again --> weight regain --> wt loss --> wt gain...you get the picture!

Research is repeatedly showing us though that weight cycling is inextricably linked to adverse physical health and psychological well-being such as:

- higher risk of mortality
- higher risk of osteoporotic fractures
- more gallstone attacks
- loss of more muscle mass compared to more stable weight BUT likely to lose less body fat,
- Significant metabolic disruption/ reductions in energy burned
- high blood pressure
- chronic inflammation and some forms of cancer such as renal cell carcinoma (kidney cancer), endometrial cancer, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- also more emotional distress – which is not surprising given the emotional roller-coaster it can be when you lose weight then gain it back, then lose it again etc etc

Not only does this fluctuation and instability over time wreak havoc on our physiology and how our body is functioning and trying to regulate itself, but also psychologically.

In most cases being overweight but a stable weight is more healthy than losing and regaining weight.

2. Increases risk of developing an eating disorder

Females who diet are up to 18% more likely to develop anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa or binge eating disorder- all of which have very serious physical and psychological consequences

3. Significantly greater disordered eating behaviours

Some disordered eating behaviours which are common in dieting, yet counterproductive for health include:

- food restriction
- skipping meals
- bingeing
- self-induced vomiting
- obsessive calorie counting and preoccupation with food
- use of laxatives or iuretics
- strict rules
- anxiety around eating

All of these behaviours lead to fatigue, nutrient deficiencies, poor concentration, affected social life and anxiety and possible depression.

4. Increased stress hormone levels and risk of depression and poor body image

Dieting, food restriction is associated with increased stress hormone cortisol in the blood. People who diet are also at a significantly greater risk of suffering depression and report poorer body image.

5. Loss of lean muscle

This is a huge consequence of dieting. As we lose muscle we lose strength & power which, unless you are a young man, is really difficult to ever regain again. This causes slower metabolism and issues with functionality and independence down the track.

6. Diets generally have poor nutritional value

Diets often restrict food groups or simply do not provide an adequate amount of foods →which means increased risk of long term deficiencies and disease such as constipation, anemia, osteoporosis, cancers, heart disease and more.

7. Weight gain

The biggest outcome of dieting, is weight gain.

#4

Focus on healthy behaviours for better results and improved health

Assessing our progress and success should not be measured by weight. With a focus on health and not the number on the scale, we can assess our progress by looking at the healthy behaviours we've adopted on a consistent basis. We can also assess how we are feeling emotionally, mentally and physically.

Have a look at these healthy nutrition behaviour examples below - how many of these do you meet on a regular basis?

Examples of healthy nutrition-related behaviours

- Meeting 2 pieces of fruit/day
- Achieving 5-6 serves of vegetables/day
- Eating adequate dairy or dairy alternative foods/day
- Moderating alcohol intake to 1-2 standard drinks/day
- Increasing the food sources of healthy polyunsaturated fats
- Increasing fibre intake to meet 30g+ per day
- Practicing mindful eating
- Becoming a more intuitive eater
- Learning to cope with guilt and anxiety around food
- Reduce foods containing trans and saturated fats
- Moderating foods containing refined sugars
- Choose carbohydrate foods which are mostly low GI
- Include fish 2-3 times per week
- Increase weekly variety of nutritious foods in the diet
- Eating together as a family more often
- Meal planning
- Cooking at home more often and relying less on takeaway foods
- Become more aware of emotional eating episodes



There are many more individualised nutrition behaviours to focus on for specific health goals. Speak to an Accredited Practising Dietitian for advice.

Goal-setting

Now reflect on your goals. Dig deeper than a weight goal. Why are you wanting to lose weight? What are the more behaviour focused goals you can set

Do you currently have the desire or goal for weight loss?

Why do you want to lose weight? Is it for health reasons? If so, what aspects of health in particular are you aiming to improve?

What healthy behaviours can you aim to put in place which will work toward your health goals?

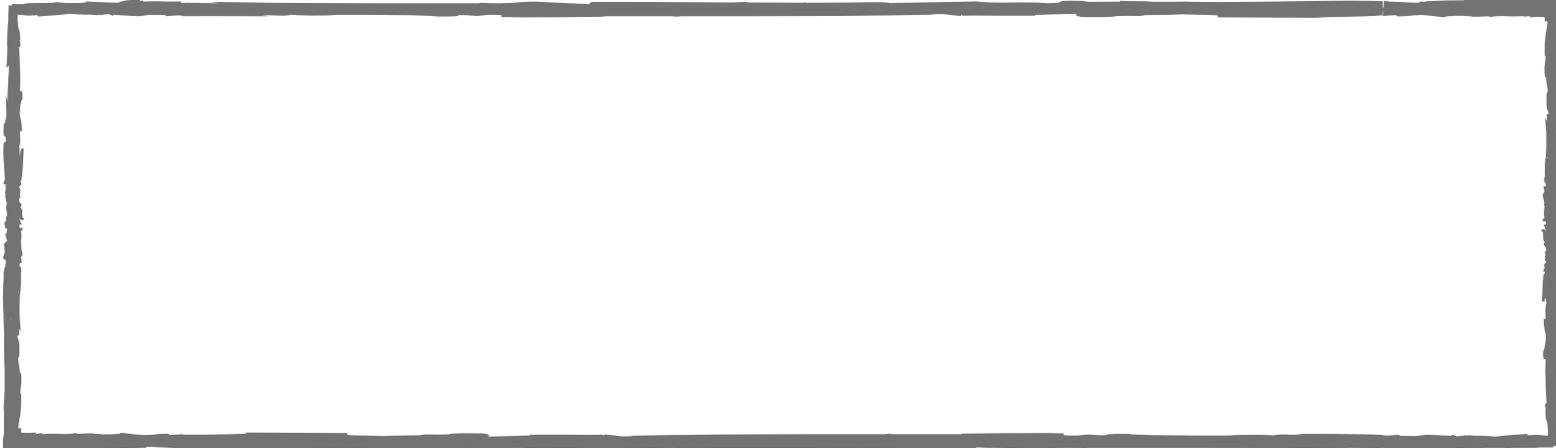
Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation is doing something without any obvious external rewards. You do it because it's enjoyable, interesting and leaves you feeling good. Extrinsic motivators are an outside incentive or pressure to do it, such as a reward or deadline.

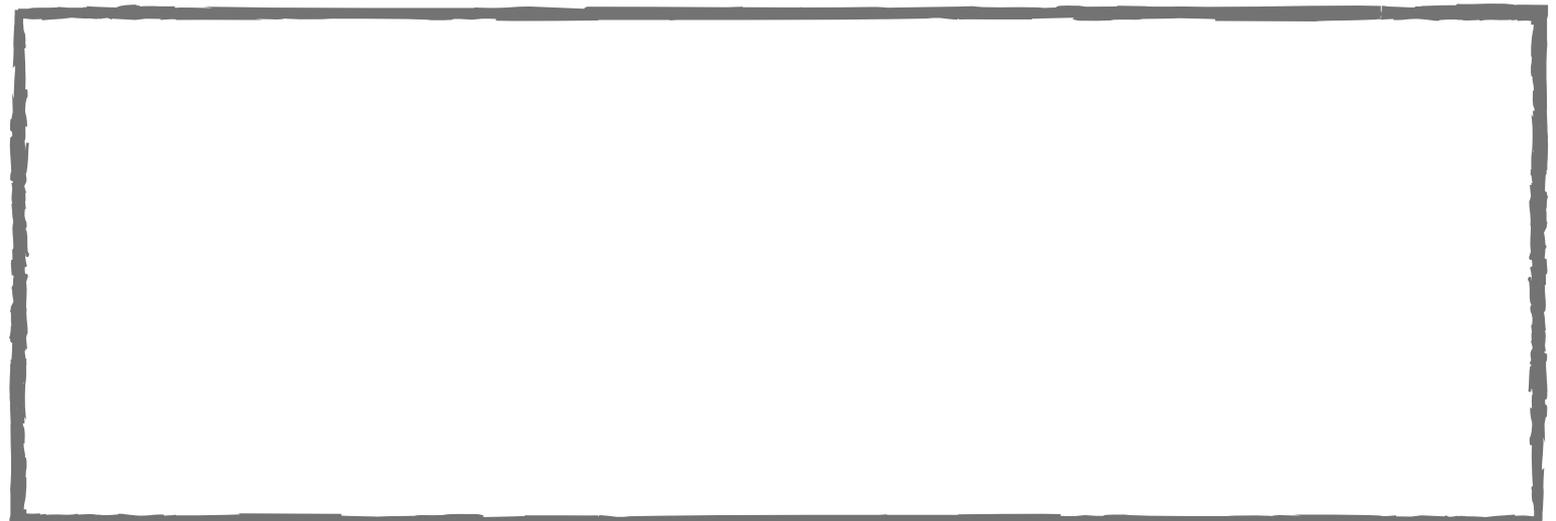
Research shows that if you are motivated by intrinsic reasons, you are more likely to enjoy and sustain exercise and dietary changes long-term compared to if you had extrinsic motivators only. At the end of the day, we will not be successful at reaching our goals if we do not sustain any behaviour changes.

The key to finding intrinsic motivation is to reflect on the internal benefits of the changes you're making (how it makes you feel), rather than the external ones (such as fitting into a dress, achieving a number on a scale, a reward etc)

What are your intrinsic reasons for making nutrition changes?



What are your intrinsic reasons for exercising on a regular basis?



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