



## **GOOD-BYE, “DIET” AND “DEPRIVATION!” HELLO, “LIFESTYLE CHANGE!”**

**By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.**

Now more than ever in the U. S., we have so many ways to combat weight problems (i.e., diets, diet programs and groups, pills, gyms, low-calorie, low-fat food, etc.) Yet, now more than ever, we reportedly have EPIDEMIC proportions of people who are overweight or obese. It is not that nothing works – the main difficulty is what happens to a person AFTER the weight loss. As hard as it can be to shed some pounds, it is even harder to MAINTAIN this achievement. Thus, the “yo-yo” effect too often occurs with people who find themselves in an unwanted, frustrating, and often demoralizing pattern of attempting to lose weight and maybe doing so, keeping the weight off for a while, and then eventually getting lax and reverting back to the same behaviors, attitudes, and feelings that put the previous weight on and will probably cause weight gain AGAIN.

There are many reasons contributing to why so many people struggle like this. Frequently, people are motivated to lose weight for “temporary” incentives such as when attending an upcoming special event (i.e., a school reunion, a wedding, etc.), or at certain times of the year, such as on January 1. And, of course, now that summer is approaching, many people are driven to lose weight to fit into their “itsy-bitsy, teenie-weenie polka-dot bikinis” and shorts! With these external incentives, one can be highly motivated to make and follow a weight-loss plan to eat fewer calories and exercise more. The person may succeed at reaching a desired weight in time for that special event or season; however, one subconsciously may become more careless with his/her eating and exercise habits afterwards, especially if there is no other external motivator keeping the person inspired.

Also, people often can't maintain weight loss if they feel prohibited from EVER eating a favorite, high-caloric food again. A person can feel DEPRIVED, which eventually may lead to overeating, and perhaps, weight gain again for him or her.

Ways to lose and keep weight off include: Think of one's weight-loss plan as neither deprivational nor punitive, but as a “LIFESTYLE CHANGE,” in which one can healthily eat and exercise in ways that can be incorporated into and MAINTAINED in one's world. Don't use the word “diet” regarding healthier eating styles, since it often feels negative and may lead to rebellion, resistance, and resentment. Watch for the subtle ways calories – and weight – can add up: eating foods late at night (i.e., carbohydrates and sugar), consuming the little, “invisible” high-caloric items (i.e., butter, margarine, salad dressing, cream cheese, etc.), eating in front of the television (which can encourage “mindless” eating), eating too much low-fat food (which CAN cause weight gain), eating fast-food, eating too quickly and with large bites, and eating from EMOTIONAL, rather than physical hunger. It is often recommended that one “graze” during the day, eating a balanced breakfast, lunch, and dinner with a healthy snack after each, since the body apparently processes the intake of LESS food, and, thus, calories, better. And sometimes DO eat one's favorite, high calorie food (within reason) to reduce deprivational feelings.

Keep exercising going by having an INTERNAL motivation for WHY you are exercising (i.e., to reduce stress, depression, and/or anxiety, and to be physically healthy), exercise in time increments that you can fit into an on-going schedule (i.e., usually at least thirty minutes of exercise several times a week is considered adequate), and vary the exercise to decrease monotony, resentment, and burn-out. If a person cannot control one's overeating and/or cannot maintain one's weight loss, seek help from a Psychologist specializing in these areas to reveal what is keeping the need for overeating and/or the “yo-yo” pattern going, so that one may truly RESOLVE these issues and move on.

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