Dear Alice,

I am a female, five feet tall and about 127 lbs. I am not satisfied with my size. I am not obsessed with weight but with the way I look. I am very strong and have plenty of muscle. It just happens to be covered by a thick layer of fat. Yes, it runs in my family. On my father's side everyone has trouble with their weight.

I am writing to you because I don't understand why I am not losing weight. I am a vegan. I have no dairy products and no fat content in my diet. Except for the occasional pat of margarine and fried falafel, I don't see why I haven't lost weight because I just cut the dairy products out about two months ago. I have been a vegetarian for 9 years. I ride a stationary bike twice a week in my target heart rate zone. I work out with weights and do calisthenics in my room every night. What is wrong? Is there another factor I am not considering? Glands? Do I just need to be patient? I like being big, I just don't want it all to be fat.

Thank You.
Gland Problem?

Answer

Dear Gland Problem?,

First off, great job with your daily exercise routine! Moving on to your question, genetics do influence body size and body fat composition, but family tendencies are only part of the picture.

Based on your description, your eating and exercise habits seem fairly healthy. Avoiding fatty foods is one weight loss strategy, but ultimately a person needs to cut overall calories, not necessarily fat, to lose pounds. In fact, eating a moderate amount of healthy fats can help make meals satisfying, so that filling up on "empty" calories from sugary, salty, or processed foods becomes a habit of the past. For veggie- and vegan-friendly weight loss tips, check out Weightloss diets for vegetarians, and everybody [2] in the Go Ask Alice! archive. As a new vegan, take care to eat a variety of whole grains, legumes (beans and peas), seeds, and nuts to for adequate protein. You may be interested in Vegan Eating [3] (also in the Go Ask Alice! archive) for more vegan nutrition info.

People naturally have varying percentages of body fat ? and that's OK. How do you feel in your body? Strong? Healthy? Sluggish? Some people choose to focus on maintaining a
feeling of good health, rather than a specific body weight. Experimenting with foods and your exercise routine can help you figure out what makes your body feel best.

If you are set on losing weight, depending on your body type, it may take a while to notice significant weight loss. Research shows that genetics explain 25 to 70 percent of the variation in body mass index (BMI). If many of your family members are on the heavy side, you may be predisposed to carry a bit more weight. Also, your body may be happy and healthy at its current weight, since you are already eating well and exercising regularly. These factors don’t mean that your weight cannot be changed, but your weight loss may occur gradually. The good news is that people who lose weight slowly are more likely to keep off the pounds in the long run.

If you’d like to learn more, you might be interested in speaking with a registered dietitian. A dietitian can help you determine a realistic weight for your body and family history, and together you can craft a personalized eating and physical activity plan to reach your goal.

Regardless of where the scale points, you can feel proud of your healthy eating, physical activity habits, and your strong body. Here’s to good nutrition and fitness!

Alice!
Category: 
Nutrition & Physical Activity [4]
Miscellaneous [5]

Related questions

The right weight for my height? [6]
Fat to muscle? [7]
What’s more important: Calories or fat grams? [8]
Is it better to be fit and fat, or unfit and thin? [9]
Weight training: Do I need to change my workout to see results? [10]
Losing "FUPA" weight [11]

Resources

Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside) [12]
Student Health Service Nutrition Services (CUMC) [13]

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