Dear Alice,

I am looking for a weight loss diet and I am a vegetarian. I don't eat beef, ham, poultry or seafood. I am finding it difficult to find a diet that fits this criteria. Yes, I know that if I only eat vegetables, I shouldn't have a weight problem, but it is stubborn baby fat! Can you suggest anything?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Fortunately for people who wish to lose weight, there are universal rules that apply, regardless of your typical diet? whether you're a vegetarian or omnivore. First, to lose weight a person has to use more energy (calories) than s/he takes in. To achieve this deficit you can either make dietary changes (so you're taking in less calories), get more physical activity (so you're using more calories in a day), or you can make changes in both areas. Experts recommend making both dietary changes and getting more physical activity for the best results.

It takes a deficit of about 3500 calories to lose one pound of body weight. This means if you are able to cut 500 calories per day from your regular diet you should be able to lose a pound a week (a healthy weight loss rate). It may be beneficial to consider finding the right balance of increasing your physical activity and decreasing caloric intake. You can check out the ChooseMyPlate.gov SuperTracker as a resource that can help you calculate how many calories you need per day, what nutrients are in the foods you eat, and how many calories you burn doing different exercises.

Some suggestions for dietary changes to reduce calories:

- Steam, boil or bake foods instead of frying in butter or oil.
- Sauté foods in vegetable broth, wine, or water instead of oil.
- Limit of high-fat condiments (like mayonnaise, margarine, sour cream, cream cheese, salad dressing, etc.).
- Try low-fat dairy products and nut- or peanut butter. Vegetarians sometimes begin to rely heavily on these foods as sources of protein, but low-fat dairy and nut products provide the same amount of protein as their full-fat counterparts.
- Add beans and legumes to your diet as low-fat sources of protein.
- Eat actual fruit or vegetables rather than drinking them in juice or smoothie form. The fiber in fresh produce works well to satisfy hunger.
Substitute water, tea, and diet beverages for regular soda, juices, and other high-sugar drinks.
Limit the amount of alcoholic beverages consumed (empty calories for everyone).
Begin lunch or dinner with a broth-based, vegetable filled soup or a large salad with a small amount of low-fat or fat-free dressing. These foods take longer to eat and can help curb your hunger so you don't overeat during the rest of the meal.
Be mindful of portion sizes? read nutrition fact labels to find out serving sizes. Some rules of thumb:
- A medium apple or orange is the size of a tennis ball.
- A medium potato is the size of a computer mouse.
- An average bagel is the size of a hockey puck.
- An ounce of cheese is size of four dice.

Some suggestions for incorporating more physical activity into your day:

- Take the stairs as often as possible.
- Park at the far end of the parking lot or get off the bus or subway a stop early.
- Schedule your cardiovascular exercise (walking, jogging, swimming, biking, frantically cleaning your apartment before visitors come over, etc.) so you know you will be able to fit it in.

Hopefully, you'll find some of these suggestions new and helpful. Good luck!

Alice!

Category:
- Nutrition & Physical Activity [3]
- Optimal Nutrition [4]
- Vegetarianism [5]
- Weight Gain & Loss [6]

Related questions

- No time to cook? [7]
- I can't get rid of my abdominal fat! [8]
- Becoming a vegetarian? Columbia Health resources? [9]
- Calories: Does it matter where they come from? [10]
- Diet sodas and drinking calories [12]

Resources

- Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside) [13]
- Student Health Service Nutrition Services (CUMC) [14]

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