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PHYSICAL • WEIGHT

Lasting Weight Loss

It requires a personalized plan.



by Stan Spencer

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO TO LOSE weight is to *restrict calories* for a few days (what most diets do). However, most diets are so unpleasant, inconvenient, boring, complex, or expensive that you can't stick with it. You soon quit the diet, fall back into old habits, and weight returns.

Permanent weight loss requires permanent changes in habits. And this requires you to *create your own weight loss plan*—one aimed at *your habits* and custom-made to fit your needs, abilities, preferences. You become *naturally thin* by reshaping habits that cause excess weight. Your weight loss plan should have *nine elements*:

1. Heed your personal preferences. You need not make yourself miserable. Eating yogurt can help you lose weight, but if you don't like yogurt, don't include it in your plan. You can do many other things to lose weight naturally.

2. Make changes you can live with. Include only *those things you want to make lifelong habits*. Giving up desserts for a month may help, but *the weight will return* when you start eating desserts again. So, try limiting yourself to one dessert a day, and make it a lifelong habit.

3. Control emotional eating. You often eat for emotional comfort. Learn to regulate your emotions in other ways: get more social interaction, think in a more healthy way, or try meditation or mindfulness to calm your emotions.

4. Calm your cravings. Cravings for junk food can crush your resolve and

wreck your attempts to lose weight. The key is making the cravings weaker so your willpower does the job. For example, taking a brisk, short walk helps reduce chocolate cravings.

5. Try simple weight loss recipes. Prepare natural weight loss foods. Make a yogurt parfait or hot whole-grain cereal for

breakfast. Simple, natural meals need not be difficult or time-consuming.

6. Remove temptations. It's easier to *remove temptations* than to *resist them*. Get rid of junk food. Avoid places that tempt you to over-eat. Stock your refrigerator with weight-loss foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, yogurt, nuts and whole grains.

7. Do smarter exercise.

Stop doing *exercises you hate*. Get exercise that you enjoy. And, exercise with someone else. You'll stick with it longer. Do exercises that build muscle, not just burn calories directly. New muscle will boost your metabolism so you burn more calories.

8. Make easy changes in habits first. Don't try to develop all of your weight loss habits at once. Start with the easy ones. Once you reap rewards, you'll be motivated to tackle habits that require more effort. After three weeks, *the new habit will feel natural, and you'll be thinner*.

9. Go for gradual weight loss. It's better to lose 20 pounds over a year than 20 pounds in a month—*then gain it back*. PE

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ACTION: *Make a new plan for the new year.*

