

Why Is It So Hard To Lose Weight?

Pamela A. Popper, President

Wellness Forum Health

InforMED™ Medical Decision-Making

Obesity is Not New

“Sudden death is more common in those who are naturally fat than in the lean”

“Obesity is not only a disease itself but the harbinger of others.”

Hippocrates

Chadwick J, Mann WN. *Medical Works of Hippocrates*. Boston, MA: Blackwell Scientific Publications;1950:154.

Bain C. “Commentary: What’s past is prologue.” *Int J Epidemiol* 2006;35(1):16-7.

Obesity is Not New

- Obesity has been documented in ancient civilizations
- Obese people appear in Stone Age drawings
- Obesity is not new; the prevalence has changed
- For most of our time on this planet, people had to work hard to get enough calories; as a result, few people were obese

Boriani F, Taveggia A, Cravero L. "Obesity and body contouring: contemporary lessons from a historical example." *Obes Surg* 2005;15(8):1218.

Bray GA. "Obesity: historical development of scientific and cultural ideas." *Int J Obes* 1990;14(11):909-26.

Early Weight Loss Programs

- First famous person to try a formal weight loss program was William the Conqueror (first King of England)
 - adopted a liquid diet – only alcohol
 - lost enough weight to ride horses again, but was killed while riding
 - still obese – had to be squeezed into his casket
 - may have been the first failed attempt to lose weight with diet

Early Weight Loss Programs

- 1820 – Lord Byron promoted water mixed with apple cider vinegar as a way to lose weight
- The first “diet book” was published in 1863 -written by an obese person who lost weight with high-protein diet
- 1903 – William Howard Taft became so obese he got stuck in a tub, pledged to lose weight
- First American diet guru – Horace Fletcher – early 20th century
 - promoted chewing food until it was liquified – claimed it would keep teeth clean, help with weight loss, save money on food
 - if rules were followed, he claimed you could eat anything you wanted and still lose weight

Short T. *Discourse concerning the causes and effects of corpulency together with the method for its prevention and cure*. London: J Roberts; 1727.
Banting W. *A Letter on Corpulence Addressed to the Public*. London: Harrison and Sons (Reprinted in *Obes Res* 1993;1:153-156); 1863.

Early Weight Loss Programs

- 1925 – Lucky Strike cigarettes advertised smoking as a way to lose weight - claimed nicotine suppressed appetite; advised people to choose smoking instead of sweets
- 1930's – grapefruit diet became popular – eating grapefruit at every meal was supposed to help with weight loss
- 1950's – Cabbage Soup Diet promised weight loss of 15-20 pounds in one week by eating cabbage soup every day

Early Weight Loss Programs

- 1960's Weight Watchers started when housewife Jean Nidetch discovered that she needed support to maintain weight loss – 400 people showed up at the first meeting
- Other interesting 20th century weight loss ideas:
 - Tapeworm diet – swallow pills with tapeworms
 - Cookie diet – cookie made of special ingredients
 - Scarsdale Diet
 - Drugs like Dexatrim
 - Appetite suppressants like Ayds
 - Aerobics, Jazzercise

The quest for effective programs for weight loss started over 1000 years ago and continues today

We Are Eating More!

Commodity Group	1970 In pounds	2003 In pounds	Increase # 1970-2003	Increase in calories
Fats & Oils	53	86	63%	216
Grains, Sugar, & Sweeteners	136	194	43%	188
	119	142	19%	76
Meat, Eggs , Nuts	226	242	7%	24
Vegetables and Fruits	337	418	24%	16
Dairy	564	594	5%	-11
Total	1675	1950	16%	523
ERS Data				

Humans Are Maladapted

- The problem is that the historical advantages of fat storage (survival) are disadvantages today
- Today:
 - food is always available
 - not hard to get, little energy required to get it
 - inexpensive
- Physical activity is not required for daily life and making a living
- Humans carry our biological past with us, and that affects how we react to our current environment
- One reason for the increase in obesity is that humans are not well-adapted for living in today's environment

What is Rare Becomes More Desirable

Kangaroo Rats:

- In captivity, they were fed chow, seeds and iceberg lettuce (a preferred food)
- Rats were developing fractured legs
- Quantity of food eaten was more than animals would normally eat
- Chow was rarely consumed, seeds were eaten regularly, iceberg lettuce was always eaten
- Diet changed to reduce seeds and use iceberg lettuce as a treat resulted in no more fractures

What is Rare Becomes More Desirable

What happened?

- Kangaroo rats are desert animals
- They get leaves rarely - only when there are seasonal rains
- Leaves are rare but important and the rats are motivated to eat them
- In captivity, the rats were experiencing perpetual spring – their environment had changed but their physiology had not adapted to change

Power ML, Schulkin J. *The Evolution of Obesity*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009. pp 102-3.

Humans in a Modern Environment

- We take foods that would normally be rare and make them available all the time- foods high in fat, sugar and calories – eating these foods activates our internal reward system
- Our ancestors would have invested considerable effort to get these foods, while we don't have to expend much effort at all – they are *always* available
- Today food is everywhere, feeding requires no decision making – does not even have to be done in place of something else – we can even eat while we do other things

Problem #1

- Sarcopenia – the decrease in lean muscle and increase in body fat that takes place over time; is a function of aging
- Can be counteracted by eating well and physical activity
- BUT many people do not eat well or exercise enough
- Burn rate: one pound of muscle burns 14 calories per day, one pound of fat burns 3 calories per day
- As a person loses muscle and gains fat, calorie intake can remain the same while weight is gained
 - “My eating habits have not changed – why am I gaining weight? It must be my metabolism!”
- Correct – the basal metabolic rate has slowed due to changes in body composition

Problem #2

- People become stuck in their bad habits, and habits are hard to change
- Why? we have two “selves” that determine behavior – conscious self and automatic self
- Automatic self responsible for most behavior, conscious self addresses things that require deliberation
- Automatic self makes most of the decisions every day
 - key to survival – if people had to think about everything every day they could not function
- Automatic self determines daily habits, which are repeated thousands of times
 - repetition wires the brain and makes habits the default choice
 - responses are automatic - “when this happens, I always do that”

Problem #3

- Influences on the automatic self:
 - childhood – watching parents and other adults
 - personal experiences
 - perceptions of self (confidence, self-worth, self-esteem)
 - value system – what is and is not important (health?)
 - paradigms and assumptions on which we base values and decisions
 - “Having children means you can’t spend time on yourself”
 - “Willpower is needed for habit change. I don’t have it.”
 - “I can’t change important things in my life.”
 - emotional issues - anger, guilt, fear

Problem #4

- Self-destructive thoughts and habits:

- poor impulse control

- seeking short-term pleasure at the expense of long-term gain

- procrastination

- distraction – so preoccupied checking things off the “to-do” list there is no time for important things – relationships, self-care, what matters in life

- denial – “I don’t really have a problem”

- “feeling special” – “I won’t get sick – I don’t have time”

- delusional thinking – “I’ll start taking care of myself when I’m not so busy, and I’ll do it before I have a heath crisis”

Problem #5

- The undertow – concept described by psychologist Richard O'Connor, Ph.D.:
 - combination of factors that increase risk and make people vulnerable to relapse just when they think they are getting better
 - the connections made in the brain from thousands of repetitions become lighter over time but are always there
 - people often change habits without examining the reasons for their choices and behaviors – changes in behavior do not always reflect changes in self
 - good behavior for a while does not erase the assumptions and paradigms that drive your bad behavior

Problem #6

- Weight loss plans are deceptively advertised as being easy
- Losing weight and keeping it off is not easy
- Changing any habit is not easy for most people
- Incorrect assumptions
 - this just involves learning new eating habits
 - this time I will stick with it
 - I know myself and will be watching for signs that I'm slipping
 - once I get started I'll be motivated by my own success to stick with it
 - this time I'm learning from someone who lost weight and she has "the secret"
- Most people do not start weight loss programs understanding how much work is involved, how much introspection is required, and how long it will take to reprogram the automatic self

How To Change Things

- Self- examination:
 1. Paradigms and assumptions that drive your behavior and underlie your automatic self
 - how were these paradigms and assumptions formed?
 - must be willing to change paradigms and assumptions that no longer serve you – takes time and deliberate effort
 2. Character, facing things that are unpleasant
 - character is formed by the habits you practice
 - what do your current habits say about your character?
 - only changing habits can change your character – takes time, work, and honesty
- Commitment and hard work – a true test of character
- Willingness to address other problems that surface while working on this one

How To Change Things

- Surrender – the things you have done in the past did not lead to success, you agree to work on discontinuing fantastical and unreasonable thoughts that they will work now
- Accountability – to self and others

Why Would You Do This?

- To lose weight. Duh.
- The real reasons (which lead to weight loss):
 - Improved character, which leads to better self-esteem. People feel good about themselves when they do the right things
 - More mindful approach to living, which leads to more happiness and satisfaction
 - Mastery of problem-solving skills which can be applied to other issues
 - Opportunity for permanent change and to end the cycle of commitment, temporary gain, reversion to old behaviors, and starting over again

What Is Required?

- Application and interview
- Commitment to the plan
 - willingness to change diet and exercise habits
 - willingness to be open and honest about thinking patterns and behaviors
 - one-on-one appointments
 - monthly workshops via teleconference
 - regular submission of food journals and exercise logs
 - accountability for achieving goals

How This Will Work

- Application
- Interview
- First one-on-one appointment – review current practices, identify vulnerabilities, develop a plan
- Mandatory participation in twice-monthly teleconference workshops: problem solving and strategy sessions
- At least 1 one-on-one appointment per month to review food journals, progress toward behavioral change, actual weight loss
- Continue participation through maintenance phase

What's Next?

If you are ready to start doing the hard work required to change your weight, your body, and your life, email pampopper@msn.com to request an application, or call 614 841-7700 for more information.