

Do you really want to lose weight?

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February 2019

CCM

Dr. Jorge Duchicela

1) An evolutionary clue to how our bodies burn calories

Scientists have demonstrated that a tribe in Tanzania burns the same amount of energy or calories as people in the United States. They concluded that it's extremely difficult for people to lose weight once they've gained it by simply exercising more. It is related to food intake.

2) Exercise is excellent for health

Researchers have found that while exercise led to only modest weight loss, study participants who exercised more (even without changing their diets) saw a range of health benefits, including reducing their blood pressure and triglycerides in their blood. Exercise reduces the risk of diabetes, stroke and heart attack. They also have shown that people who exercise are at a lower risk of developing cognitive impairment from dementia.

3) Exercise alone is almost useless for weight loss

To explore the effects of more exercise on weight, researchers have followed everybody from people training for marathons to sedentary young twins to postmenopausal overweight and obese women who ramp up their physical activity through running, cycling or personal training sessions. Most people in these studies typically only lost a few pounds at best, even under highly controlled scenarios where their diets were kept constant.

4) Exercise accounts for a small portion of daily calorie burn

One very underappreciated fact about exercise is that even when you work out, those extra calories burned only account for a tiny part of your total energy expenditure. It only represents 10-30% of energy expenditure. Food represents 100% of energy intake. This is why it's not so surprising that exercise leads to [statistically] significant, but SMALL, changes in weight.

5) It's hard to create a significant calorie deficit through exercise

If a person is overweight or obese, and presumably trying to lose dozens of pounds, it would take an incredible amount of time, will and effort to make a real impact through exercise. Researchers find again and again that exercise can help you maintain the weight you have lost, but it does not help you to lose weight.



"A person would need to walk 33 miles to lose 1 pound of fat".

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6) Exercise can undermine weight loss in other, subtle ways

One 2009 study shows that people seemed to increase their food intake after exercise — either because they thought they burned off a lot of calories or because they were hungrier. If a person worked hard on a machine for an hour, that work can be erased with five minutes of eating afterward. A single slice of pizza, for example, could undo the calories burned in an hour's workout. A cafe mocha or an ice cream cone could do the same.

7) Exercise may cause physiological changes that help us conserve energy

The most intriguing theories about why exercise isn't great for weight loss describe changes in how our bodies regulate energy after exercise. One of them is the Metabolic Compensation, in which people might rest or eat more after workout in order to conserve energy. If they conserve energy, they may not lose weight.

8) Energy expenditure might have an upper limit

Another hypothesis about why it's hard to lose weight through exercise alone is that energy expenditure plateaus at a certain point. Researchers state that total energy expenditure was positively correlated with physical activity, but the relationship was markedly stronger over the lower range of physical activity. In other words, after a certain amount of exercise, you don't keep burning calories at the same rate; total energy expenditure may eventually plateau.

9) The government and the food industry are doling out unscientific advice

In the United States, nearly 70 percent of the population is either overweight or obese. The Public Health Reports outlines the dozens of government departments and organizations whose campaigns suggested more physical activity (alone or in addition to diet) to reverse weight gain, but the evidence is now clear; exercise is excellent for health, but it's not important for weight loss. The two things should never be given equal weight in the obesity debate.

10) So what actually works for weight loss?

The National Weight Control Registry, found in their study that people who have had success losing weight have a few things in common. They weigh themselves at least once a week. They restrict their calorie intake, stay away from high-fat foods, and watch their portion sizes. Some of them also exercise regularly.



“Try eating less. Cut down your food intake by 5% in each meal.”
Dr. Jorge Duchicela

