

“How To Achieve Maximum Fitness and Weight Loss Results In Minimum Time”

18 Essential Strategies For Lasting Weight Loss Success And Lifelong Fitness

- by Curtis Penner

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The information in this publication is intended for healthy men and women over the age of eighteen. People with any health concerns should consult a physician before using any of the information contained in this publication.

About The Author



Curtis Penner began his career as a personal fitness coach in 1994. Blending humor with a strong ability to communicate, Curtis shared his passion for health and fitness with people from 14-77 years of age for the next ten years.

For most of his life, Curtis struggled with his weight – despite being active in sports and weight lifting. Then, in early 1994, something happened to change his life forever.

He discovered how to use food and exercise to shed fat more easily, without experiencing gut-wrenching hunger pains and without feeling starved or deprived. And since then, he has used this information to control his weight.

Even better though, Curtis discovered that he could use food and exercise to control the symptoms of chronic depression he had been suffering with for years.

Now as editor of *BeFitandStrong.com*, a free source of fitness and weight loss information Curtis passes on the knowledge he has gained over the past decade.

As well, Curtis has authored *Taking It Off!* (<http://befitandstrong.com/taking-it-off>), a comprehensive step-by-step guide that details how to use food to become slimmer, stronger and healthier. This guide contains the very same information Curtis discovered over a decade ago.

Curtis resides in Cambridge, Ontario, Canada with his wife Erin, daughter Jessica and his two cats – Shadow and Pippen.

Introduction

Over the last seven years, I've had the opportunity to work with people of all ages and abilities and if there's one thing I've learned it's this...

No One Likes Being Fat!

Why then do people find it so difficult to lose weight...and more importantly keep it off? Well you name the reason and chances are I've heard it...

- I'm too busy. I don't have the time.
- I'm too out-of-shape to get in-shape
- I have no willpower
- I hate exercise
- I'm menopausal
- I travel too much

The truth of the matter is, if you've tried and failed to achieve lasting weight loss success, there's just one reason...**You simply don't have all of the pieces to the puzzle.** You see, whether your goal is to lose weight, to feel better or to experience higher levels of energy, it's like putting a puzzle together. To complete the picture, you need to have all of the right pieces and then you need to put them in their proper place.

If like so many others I talk to, you are searching for a realistic and permanent solution to your weight loss problems, if you are tired of the yo-yo dieting and the loss of self-esteem that accompanies it, I've got good news because...

In just a few moments, I'll reveal the essential strategies of lasting weight loss and well-being. The puzzle pieces you need to create the picture of health you desire. I've divided the information into the three essential components: mental, nutritional and physical.

So let's get right into it.

Mental Strategy #1: Be Patient

“Have patience. All things are difficult before they become easy.”
- Sadi

In many cases, people fail to achieve their weight loss or fitness goals simply because they give up before they even get started. They mistakenly believe that if they don't see immediate results – like losing five or ten pounds in the first week or something just as ridiculous – then what they're doing isn't working.

They look in the mirror every morning expecting their overweight, out-of-shape body to be replaced with a sleek, lean and muscular body. If after a couple of weeks it doesn't happen, they quit and begin looking for the next great solution to their problem.

Lasting fitness and weight loss success requires that you learn new skills. Give yourself the time you need to master these skills. Give yourself permission to make mistakes.

Think of it this way. One day you were just a baby learning to walk. You tried and tried but more often than not, you fell flat on your diaper. One day however, you did it. You took one step...then another...and another. And you were off. Free to explore on your own two feet.

Now imagine if your parents had given up on you after just a few failed attempts at trying to walk. It's silly, I know. But so is trying something for just a few weeks and then quitting when you don't see immediate transformation.

That's not to say you don't make adjustments as you go, but you need to be patient with the process and most importantly with yourself.

Mental Strategy #2: Be Persistent

“Patience, persistence and perspiration make an unbeatable combination for success.”

- Napoleon Hill

It happens every year in January. Millions of people flock to the gyms determined that this is the last year they will ever resolve to lose weight. Then about six weeks later...

Life hits them right between they eyes!

Something happens to test their resolve. Maybe they get sick. They miss a workout or two or three. Or they have to travel for work. Perhaps their diet gets thrown off by a birthday celebration or a vacation. Whatever it is, their perfect plan gets derailed and they never recover – never get back on track.

Know this...

Events you didn't plan for will happen. Life follows no plan exactly. You must expect the unexpected and resolve to persist no matter what. When the unexpected happens, do not panic. Don't feel like all hope is lost. Don't throw your hands up in despair. Instead, deal with and keep moving forwards.

Mental Strategy #3: Take Consistent Action

I never worry about action, but only inaction.
- Winston Churchill

What is consistency? Being consistent means doing the things you need to do to reach your goal...day after day...week after week...year after year.

If your plan calls for you to eat 5 or 6 healthy meals every day, but instead you average maybe 2 or 3 or you need to workout 4 days a week and you barely manage 2 workouts, how effective do you think your fitness or weight loss efforts will be?

Being patient without being consistent in your actions will only result in a great deal of time going by without accomplishing anything.

Being persistent without being consistent will only serve to frustrate you. Learning to persist through obstacles and challenges is certainly important for you to reach your goals, but if the action you take is inconsistent, you'll always feel like you're spinning your wheels, getting nowhere fast.

When it comes to taking action, something is always better than nothing. Maybe you don't have time to walk for an hour, but you can squeeze in fifteen minutes. Then do it. If you don't have time to do that full-body workout you found at <http://befitandstrong.com> then, why not do an express version of it that only takes 20 minutes? Consistent action builds momentum.

Since walking for just fifteen minutes or lifting weights for twenty minutes won't provide you with the same fat-burning benefits of working out longer, you may be tempted to say "forget it", and you'd be right. BUT...

When you take small, consistent actions, you accomplish something way more important than burning a few calories. What you do is you establish the habit of being fit and healthy. You send your brain and your body the message that eating right and exercising sits high on your list of priorities.

Additionally, you develop the habit of activity. By taking small, consistent actions, you "hardwire" the activity into your brain. Just as brushing your teeth before bed has become "hardwired" into your nightly routine, you can make exercise or drinking enough water or eating 5-6 small meals a day a part of your daily routine.

Mental Strategy #4: Get Clear On What You Want

"The reason most people never reach their goals is that they don't define them, or ever seriously consider them as believable or achievable. Winners can tell you where they are going, what they plan to do along the way, and who will be sharing the adventure with them."

- Denis Waitley, Ph.D.

It's sad really. Most people give more thought to what they're going to wear on any given day than to their health and fitness goals. After all, half of getting what you want is knowing what you want.

When I ask people what they want to accomplish with respect to their health, I usually hear one of three things:

1. I want to lose weight.
2. I want to feel better.
3. I want to have more energy.

While they may sound like noble goals, they lack focus or clarity and provide very little inspiration. The first step then is to clearly and specifically state what it is you want to accomplish.

Instead of "I want to lose weight", for example, you could state your goal as, "I now weigh a healthy and strong 160 pounds." If you don't want to focus on body weight then you could say, "I now have a lean 34" waist." Or maybe, "I now fit comfortably into a size 8 pair of jeans."

Rather than saying "I want to feel better", ask yourself, "What has to happen for me to feel better?" Maybe you'll feel better with lower blood pressure. Your goal then could be, "I now maintain a healthy blood pressure range of 115/70."

The same thing goes for wanting to have more energy. What has to happen for you to know you have more energy than you do right now? Maybe you'll know you have more energy when you can climb a flight of stairs without becoming winded. Then you could state your goal as "I now have more than enough energy to climb a flight of stairs."

Aside from being specific, it's important that your goals be believable. If you don't feel in your gut that you can achieve your goal, you will resist all efforts – consciously or unconsciously – to do what you need to do.

Let's say you want to lose 100 pounds, but the thought of it seems too daunting. Choose a number that you feel would be challenging but still excites you when you think of doing it.

Mental Strategy #5: Develop Powerful Reasons For Reaching Your Goal

“Strong reasons make strong actions.”
- William Shakespeare

Imagine for a moment, sitting in your Doctor's office, when she enters and, with a solemn tone, informs you that you have contracted a rare disease called...

"Avidus-exerciseitis".

Your Doctor explains that, while potentially deadly, your condition can be treated. To stay alive, you must get thirty minutes of exercise each and every day. Missing even one day would mean instant death.

Given the circumstances, do you think you'd ever say to yourself, "I just don't have the time to exercise today?"

Without knowing you, I'll go out on a limb and say "NOT". Even if it meant the dusting didn't get done...or the lawn went another day without being cut...or any one of the thousand-and-one things on your "to do" list went unfinished, you would do anything to make sure you fit that thirty minutes of exercise into your day.

You see, when you have strong enough reasons for doing something, you'll do it...no matter what. If you say you can't lose weight because you don't have the time or you don't have any willpower, or the sky's too blue, what you're really saying is you haven't come up with enough strong reasons for doing what's necessary.

On a piece of paper, write down all the reasons why you want to reach your goal. When you're done, look at each specific reason and ask yourself "Why?" again. For example...

I want to have a lean 34" waist because...I want to look good on the beach. Why do I want to look good on the beach? Because I'll feel more confident.

When you can't squeeze another reason from your brain, put your list where you will see it every day. Give it a quick read every morning before you begin the day and every evening before you go to sleep.

Having strong reasons - I mean really strong reasons - for achieving your weight loss goal can help pull you through even the most challenging of times.

Mental Strategy #6: Visualize Your Success

“Begin to imagine what the desirable outcome would be like. Go over these mental pictures and delineate details and refinements. Play them over and over to yourself.”

- Maxwell Maltz

Back in 1960, Maxwell Maltz, considered by many to be the premier authority on the study of the self-image, wrote his best-selling book titled, *Psycho-Cybernetics*. In it he writes...

“A human being always acts and feels and performs in accordance with what he imagines to be true about himself and his environment...In short, you will ‘act like’ the sort of person you conceive yourself to be. Not only this, but you literally cannot act otherwise, in spite of all your conscious effort or willpower.”

Until you change the way you see yourself, any attempts to lose weight will ultimately fail. Please read that last sentence again. It’s critical that you understand it. **Your outer-self will always reflect your inner self. Change occurs the moment you stop seeing yourself as a fat person** but rather a person who is lean, strong and healthy...and worthy of being so. Or another way to look at it, you are a thin person suffering from a temporary bout of “fatness”.

How do you recreate your inner picture? One of the quickest and easiest ways is by using visualization.

Visualization is simply the conscious creation of mental images for the purpose of change. In other words, you use your imagination to create a mental picture of whatever it is you want to achieve.

Like any other skill, the more you practice visualization, the better you become. The good news is this exercise doesn’t involve lifting heavy objects or any strenuous physical effort of any kind. On the contrary, visualization works best when you’re relaxed.

To visualize, sit in a comfortable chair with your feet flat on the floor. Place your hands on your lap and close your eyes. Then take a few deep breaths and allow your body to relax. Quickly move up your body starting with your feet and release any tension you find.

Once you are relaxed, imagine what your life would be like as a fit, healthy person. Allow the images to form without becoming judgmental. Just imagine “what if...” What if you were to lose that weight? What kind of clothes would you wear? What types of activities would you be able to take part in? How would your relationships improve?

Make the images as clear and as detailed as possible. Incorporate all five senses. Hear people commenting on how good you look. See your new image in the mirror, trying on new form-fitting clothes. Feel how good your flat stomach feels as you run your hand over it. Imagine how good your healthy dinner smells. Then savour the taste as you put the food in your mouth.

Take as much time as you want to visualize. When you are done, open your eyes and go about your day. Anytime you have a moment throughout the day, pick one aspect of your visualization and focus on it. It could be your workout or walking onto the beach in a new bathing suit.

In addition to seeing yourself as you want to be, you can use visualization to help form new habits. Simply visualize yourself doing the things you want to do.

A now-famous experiment proves just how powerful visualization can be:

Some time ago, an experiment was conducted with a group of basketball players. Each player took a number of free-throws to determine their shooting percentage. The players were then divided into three groups.

The first group was instructed to practice shooting free-throws for one hour each day for thirty days. The second group was asked to refrain from any practice for that same thirty-day period. The third group was asked to practice for the same one hour for thirty days. However, they were limited to using their imagination only.

They were instructed to see themselves stepping up to the free-throw line and then shooting the ball into the basket every single time. That's all they had to do. They didn't have to put on their sneakers. They didn't have to set foot onto the basketball court. They simply had to close their eyes and see themselves sinking the free-throws every single time.

At the end of the thirty days, each player's shooting percentage was tested again. As expected, group two made no improvements. Group one, which practiced every day for one-hour improved their shooting accuracy by twenty-four percent. The incredible finding of this experiment was that group three – the group that practiced using only their imagination – improved their free-throwing accuracy by twenty-three percent without setting one foot on a basketball court or even picking up a basketball.

Take some time today to imagine what it would be like to be the person you want to be. Focus on those images often. Draw upon them when you feel weak and discouraged and don't be surprised when you begin to feel the whole process becoming easier, more natural.

As the American writer, Robert Collier once said, "See things as you would have them be instead of as they are."

Nutritional Strategy #1: Eat Enough Food

Keep this in mind. Your body's number one priority is NOT to look good in a bikini or to have a six-pack set of abs. Its only concern is SURVIVAL!

The food you eat provides your body with the energy it needs to function. The amount of energy, or calories, your body requires is called the BMR or basal metabolic rate.

If you were to lay in bed all day and not move a muscle, the amount of energy your body uses to keep your heart beating, your blood pulsing and your brain thinking would be your BMR. Or put another way, your BMR equals your Bare Minimum Requirements.

We've all heard of companies who, after being hit by hard times, need to lay off some of their employees, right? Well, why do you think layoffs are one of the first things a company does when in financial trouble? It's because employees represent an enormous drain on company resources – mainly in the form of salaries, benefits and even the space they occupy.

Now think of your body as that company and the food you eat is its revenue. By drastically reducing the body's supply of food – eating below your BMR – in an attempt to lose weight, you force the body to adapt in a way that allows it to continue operating. One of the first things it does is break down lean tissue, namely muscle. This process serves to purposes.

One, the lean tissue provides the body with the energy (calories) and protein it needs to function. Protein is essential for cell development and can also be converted into ketones which keep the brain humming along. Breaking down lean tissue for energy is like the cash-strapped company dipping into its savings account.

Secondly, by consuming its own muscle, the body reduces its future demand for energy. You see, muscle is an "active" tissue – it needs calories to survive. Stored body fat on the other hand is like the bosses lazy nephew...content to just sit there and requires very, very energy to exist.

If your body feels like its being starved, what do you think it's more likely to get rid of – the low-cost fat or the high-cost muscle? It's usually the high-priced talent that gets shown the door first right? When you starve your body by dieting, your body lowers its metabolism or the rate at which it burns calories by reducing the amount of lean tissue.

So while eating a lot less food seems like the logical thing to do to lose weight, it actually works against you. The best way to shed those extra pounds of fat is to consume just slightly more calories than your BMR.

For more information on how to calculate your caloric needs, go to...
<http://befitandstrong.com/the-only-3-ways-to-lose-body-fat-part-i/>.

Nutritional Strategy #2: Eat High-Quality Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates or “carbs” as they’re often referred to are the body’s preferred source of fuel; preferred because they can be quickly broken down into energy.

When you sprint for the bus; when you chase your kids around the yard or when you startle that rather protective mother bear in the forest and have to run for your life, your muscles rely on carbohydrate stored in the muscles as glycogen to provide them with the energy they need.

Carbohydrate is also the brain’s preferred source of energy. You may be surprised and amazed to know that the brain alone uses between 150-200 grams of glucose or 600-800 calories each and every day (another reason to make sure you eat enough food – see previous strategy).

Carbs include all grains, any products made from grains (bread, pasta, cereals, crackers, donuts, chips and so on). They also include all fruit, all vegetables, legumes such as lentils and beans, all types of juice and processed sugar. Even some dairy products contain carbohydrate in the form of lactose.

When it comes to achieving maximum fitness and weight loss results, you need to make good carb choices on a consistent basis. The following guidelines will help you do just that:

- Choose foods that are as close to nature as possible. Obviously vegetables and fruit make better carb choices than processed carbs such as crackers or bread.
- Choose high-fibre foods. Fibre provides many healthful benefits, such as...
 - Helping to regulate bowel movements.
 - Reduces your risk for heart disease.
 - Helps regulate blood sugar.
 - Provides a feeling of fullness after eating.
- Reduce, or even better, eliminate sugary drinks such as pop, juice and sugar in coffee and tea. Pop, juice and sweetened coffee and tea provide very little or no nutritional benefit. Instead of drinking juice, you’re much better to eat the whole fruit which provides much needed fibre and will help you feel fuller longer.

Nutritional Strategy #3: Eat Adequate Amounts of Good Fat

Throughout the '80's and '90's, the message was, "Eating fat makes you fat". Food manufacturers hurried to produce fat-free versions of our favourite foods.

Here we are fifteen years later. Would you say that this approach has worked? Absolutely NOT! Obesity is running rampant. So, what happened? What went wrong?

Well, when food manufacturers removed the fat, they had to replace it with something that still tasted good. And that "something" was sugar...and LOADS of it. In the end, low-fat foods ended up being as high, if not higher, in calories as the full-fat versions.

The fact is, we require certain types of fats known as essential fatty acids or EFA's which are known as Omega-3 and Omega-6 fats. While critical to good health but aren't produced naturally by the body, so we must ingest them from the foods and/or supplements we eat.

EFA's are essential for...

- Joint health
- Energy production
- Cell membrane integrity
- Healthy skin texture
- High metabolic rate or burning more calories in a day.

Some good sources of EFA's include:

- Salmon and salmon oil
- Cod liver oil
- Trout or any other cold water fish
- Sardines
- Walnuts
- Flax seeds and flax seed oil

It's important that you get enough of the right types of fat in your diet each day. And at the same time, it's essential that you avoid the wrong type of fat. The very worst of the bunch is trans-fat.

Trans-fat appeared about 100 years ago. A Proctor-Gamble chemist named E. C. Kayser developed a process to hydrogenate cottonseed oil to make a new type of candle (replacing candles made by animal fat). But with the increase in electricity use, candles became less important. Since the substance being used to make the candles looked like lard, Proctor-Gamble began selling it as a cooking substance that became known as Crisco®.

To the food industry, hydrogenated fat was a billion dollar discovery. Since trans fat was more stable than regular fat – meaning it did not go rancid as quickly, food companies were able to create products able to sit on store shelves for many times longer than foods made with natural fat. You see, unsaturated fat is easily destroyed by heat and light. That’s why you find most baked and processed foods such as...

- Cookies
- Doughnuts
- Salad dressings
- Margarine
- Frozen waffles
- Vegetable shortening
- Chips
- Meal replacement bars
- Frostings
- Crackers
- Nearly anything fried (fried chicken, chicken fingers, french fries)

...Contain trans fat.

Now, it’s been discovered that trans fat is responsible for a host of health problems, including but not limited to...

- Depressed immune system function;
- Increased LDL or “bad” cholesterol levels;
- Lower HDL (good) cholesterol levels;
- Impaired liver function;
- Stickier platelets, leading to coronary disease;
- Greatly increased risk of cancer.

Here’s the bottom line:

Some fats – specifically monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and even some forms of saturated fats are essential to good health and can help you lose body fat. But trans-fat can destroy your health.

Nutritional Strategy #4: Eat Adequate Amounts of Protein

Essential for maintaining lean tissue and cell production, protein makes up nearly 20% of our body weight. From a weight loss point of view, protein helps curb hunger by releasing a hormone called glucagon. Protein is made up of twenty-two amino acids, of which there are eight that can not be produced by the body and must be supplied by the food you eat.

Eating food that contains both essential and nonessential amino acids is critical. If your body is short on any essential amino acids, the body will break down existing tissue to provide the body with what it needs. In other words, it eats its own muscle. That's why it's important to eat good sources of complete protein, such as...

- Chicken breast
- Turkey breast
- Lean cuts of beef
- Eggs and egg whites
- Lowfat dairy sources (especially cottage cheese)
- Tuna

...Every 3-4 hours throughout the day. The timing of your protein consumption is important because unlike carbohydrate and fat, protein can not be stored in the body for later use.

What about plant based proteins such as legumes and soy? How about nuts and seeds? Are they not good sources of protein?

Unfortunately, these foods do not provide all of the essential amino acids making them incomplete and therefore are not good sources of protein. That's not to say you shouldn't eat them. Nuts and seeds provide healthy fats and are loaded with fibre. Legumes would be considered a source of carbohydrate and also deliver high amounts of useful fibre.

Getting enough protein throughout the day can be challenging. That's why many fitness professionals use a high quality protein powder supplement, with the most popular type being whey protein powder.

Before you buy any protein powder, take some time to do your homework. It has become a commodity and prices vary greatly from store to store. I recommend buying from a reputable, local health food or sport supplement store. Once you've found a product you like, look online to try and find it at better prices.

Nutritional Strategy #5: Eat 5-6 Times A Day

If you have kids, you know that babies are all about 3 things: 1) eating 2) sleeping and 3) eliminating what they've eaten. They're the perfect example of how to eat. They eat only when hungry. They eat only until they're no longer hungry and they eat for nutritional value...not for taste. Ahhh. If only it remained that simple, we'd never have to worry about our weight.

But wait. There are some great lessons to be learned from our tiny members of society. First, eat small meals frequently throughout the day. Second, follow a regular feeding schedule. Here's why an eating small meals frequently throughout the day is so important:

- **It helps prevent overeating.** Eating 5-6 small meals help prevent becoming extremely hungry and then gorging on the wrong foods at the wrong time.
- **It helps maintain level blood sugar levels.** Increased blood sugar makes it very difficult to access stored fat. On the flip side, low blood sugar can lead to overpowering hunger which then leads to eating the wrong foods.
- **It helps avoid the “diet” mentality that says you must deprive yourself of food.** By eating every 3 to 3 ½ hours, you only have to focus on making it to the next meal – 3 hours away.

First, begin with your wake-up time. Your goal is to eat within the first hour of waking. Then write down the time you eat lunch and dinner. Here's a sample eating plan:

Wake-Up:	6:00 a.m.
Breakfast:	6:30 a.m.
Lunch:	12:30 p.m.
Dinner:	6:00 p.m.

Now, simply place snacks evenly between each meal. Your eating schedule might then be...

Wake-Up:	6:00 a.m.
Breakfast:	6:30 a.m.
Snack #1:	9:30 a.m.
Lunch:	12:30 p.m.
Snack #2:	3:30 p.m.
Dinner:	6:00 p.m.
Snack #3:	9:30 p.m.

Depending on when you get up, you may not need the morning snack. If that's the case, you just spread your daily calories over the five meals instead of six. Creating an eating schedule only works if you.

Nutritional Strategy #6: Always, Always, Always Eat Breakfast

This goes hand-in-hand with the last strategy, but I know there are a lot of people who don't feel like they can or that they need to eat something as soon as they start the day.

If you are saying to yourself, "I don't have time to eat breakfast", you're lying to me and to yourself. Not eating breakfast never has to do with lack of time. What it comes down to not having strong enough reasons for making time.

If your desire to lose weight isn't greater than your desire not to eat breakfast, you're doomed anyway so why bother?

I know. A little harsh, right? But it's that important. This is one thing that all people who have successfully lost weight have in common. They never, ever skip breakfast.

Most mornings I'm up at 5:00 in the morning to get ready for my first client at 6:00 a.m. I have half-an-hour to shower, get dressed, eat and get out the door. To do that, I need to be organized. I'm like a firefighter. I have my clothes all laid out so that I don't have to waste any time fumbling around in the dark.

I always make sure to have the foods I need for breakfast in the fridge. My typical breakfast consists of a scoop of protein powder mixed in water, a piece of fruit such as an apple or orange and a small handful of almonds. It takes me all of about 5-minutes to prepare and eat.

Your goal should be to eat within one hour of waking up. Studies have shown that people who eat breakfast eat fewer calories through the rest of the day. Skipping breakfast makes you prone to overeat later on.

Nutritional Strategy #8: Drink Plenty of Water

Yes, I know that you've heard this over and over again. But there's a reason for that – it's the gospel truth! The recommended amount is approximately eight glasses, or 64 ounces, of water every day. When you are exercising, you need to drink even more.

Over 75% of your body is water (even bone is more than 20% water). When you don't drink enough water your blood doesn't flow properly and your digestive system doesn't operate smoothly (among other problems). Even a small deficit of water can radically affect how your body performs.

One study even suggested that the majority of hunger pains experienced by people can be attributed not to hunger but to dehydration. Keeping your body hydrated allows your muscles to contract with more force, allowing you to reap more benefits from your exercise efforts.

Staying well-hydrated allows your kidneys to work more efficiently. If your kidneys become overworked due to dehydration, the liver must help out. This keeps the liver from doing its job properly – part of which is to process fat in the body.

When you are dehydrated, your body holds onto water. This can make you appear bloated and feel puffy. When you begin to drink enough water, you may find that you automatically lose scale weight, without doing anything else because the body doesn't have to hold on to so much fluid. Aim to drink at least 8 - 8 oz. glasses (2 litres) and as much as 16-8 oz. glasses of water (4 litres) per day, depending on your activity levels and your size.

As far as tea, coffee, milk and other beverages go, some say they count towards your water intake. Others say they don't. Why not err on the side of drinking more. The only negative is a little more time spent walking back and forth to the washroom.

Here's a clue that you're dehydrated: If your urine is a dark yellow and/or has a strong odor, you're not drinking enough water. So drink 'till your pee don't stink.

While we're on the topic of drinking...

Nutritional Strategy #9: Avoid Drinking “Empty” Calories

Q: Which has more sugar, 8 oz. of apple juice or 8 oz. of regular cola?

A: 8 oz. of apple juice has 29g of sugar while the cola has 26 grams.

Yes, the juice provides a few vitamins. Mostly vitamin C. Big deal. If you take a multi-vitamin, it doesn't matter.

In general, drinking high-sugar beverages makes it very easy for you to consume too many calories each day. Now, as bad as juice and pop are, if I had to pick one drink that brings a person's fat loss efforts to a halt faster than any other, it would be...alcohol.

If you are serious about losing weight, you should seriously consider not drinking alcohol... period.

If reading that statement makes you squirm, go back and re-examine your reasons for wanting to lose weight and then ask yourself this question: “Is having a glass of wine (bottle of beer, shot of rum) really more important to me than achieving my health and weight loss goals?”

And yes, I have heard that a glass of wine each day can be good for you, however...

I haven't met anyone who keeps it to just one small glass. Because a bottle of wine is 750 millilitres, most people end up drinking at least half that – which is more than a glass.

I'm not arguing that there aren't some benefits to consuming moderate amounts of red wine, but I believe that for those who are struggling with their weight, they will find success comes more easily by swearing off all; at least until they achieve their goals. Here's why:

- **Alcohol reduces inhibitions.** How many stupid things have been done after just a few drinks? You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that when you drink, you'll be more easily swayed by the smell of grease or the lure of sugar.
- **Alcohol is calorie dense.** Alcohol has the second highest calorie density (7 calories per gram) of all food types – second only to fat (9 calories per gram). So it's very easy to consume a large number of excess calories.
- **Alcohol can not be stored in the body like carbohydrates, protein and fat.** Therefore, it must be processed by the liver and eliminated. Unfortunately, the liver is also responsible for the processing of fat in the body. If it's busy dealing with the alcohol, it can't properly process fat.

- **Alcohol promotes over-consumption of food.** Alcohol is linked to the consumption of many different types of food – almost none of them healthy. With beer goes chicken wings, chips and nachos among other things. With cheese, you often associate crackers and high-fat cheese.
- **Alcohol has no nutritional value.** Aside from a small amount of carbs in most alcoholic drinks, there is no value to them.
- **Alcohol interferes with proper digestion** and depletes the body of certain minerals and vitamins.
- **Alcohol dehydrates your body.** And as we've already talked about, dehydration brings with it a whole host of negative effects.

I've saved the worst for last (from a man's point of view at least).

Alcohol decreases testosterone levels. Decreased testosterone limits your ability to build muscle and decreases your sex drive.

Exercise Strategy #1: Perform Strength Training Exercises

Once regarded as an activity for only the young and athletic, strength-training is quickly being recognized as an important activity for people of all ages.

It's estimated that by the age of 65, a sedentary person will have lost about half of his or her muscle mass. And statistics show that as many as 1 in 2 women and 1 in 8 men will suffer a fracture due to low bone density. The great news is that by participating in a strength-training program a person can significantly increase muscle mass as well as halt and even reverse bone density loss.

Muscle is governed by the law of "Use It or Lose It". Using a muscle makes it bigger and stronger. Not using it makes it small and weak. According to the Canadian Space Agency, studies have shown that astronauts experience up to a 20% loss of muscle mass on spaceflights lasting five to 11 days.

While activities such as walking, swimming, jogging, hiking and riding a bike help promote overall fitness and help in managing one's weight, the truth is they cannot reverse the effects of bone and muscle loss like strength training can.

In addition to building stronger muscles and bones, strength training can help control blood sugar, making it a good way to manage diabetes or avoid becoming diabetic.

Over time, your body builds up a resistance to insulin and has trouble processing the sugars in the blood. This can lead to adult onset diabetes. The good news is, just four months of regular strength training has been shown to increase glucose uptake by a whopping 23 percent, meaning the body is able to process carbohydrates more efficiently, decreasing the risk of serious disease.

Strength training can help improve flexibility. By properly moving your muscles through their full range of motion, you can significantly improve that muscle's flexibility even without performing any specific stretching exercises.

Being flexible is important for people of all ages. It helps reduce or eliminate knee and back pain. It helps reduce injuries during athletic events and is very important as we age to help prevent injury due to falling or slipping.

When you slip on a patch of ice, something has to give. With flexible muscles, you are able to withstand the sudden change in position without serious harm. However, if you are inflexible, then you can expect to suffer torn ligaments, pulled muscles or worse – dislocated joints.

Performing resistance training can help improve digestion. Dr. Wayne Westcott, research director at the South Shore YMCA in Quincy, Massachusetts states that a recent study showed a

56 percent decrease in gastrointestinal transit time after three months of strength training. This is significant because delayed digestion puts you at a higher risk for colon cancer.

Just 2 months of strength training has been shown to lower resting blood pressure. When you combine strength training with regular cardiovascular exercise, it gets even better.

If you suffer from back pain, strength training may be give you the relief you're looking for. If the muscles surrounding your spine are strong, they will be more able to protect the spine from undue pressure and stress. Weak midsections and lower weak back muscles contribute to countless hours of time lost in the workplace. Just a few minutes a week spent strengthening the back could dramatically improve your quality of life.

On its website, the Arthritis Foundation writes:

“You may think that exercise and arthritis do not go hand in hand. If so, you would be mistaken. It was thought for many years that if you had arthritis you should not exercise because it would damage your joints. Now, however, research has shown that exercise is an essential tool in managing your arthritis.

Mainly, exercise reduces joint pain and stiffness, builds strong muscle around the joints, and increases flexibility and endurance. It also helps promote overall health and fitness by giving you more energy, helping you sleep better, controlling your weight, decreasing depression, and giving you more self-esteem.”

Strength training not only helps you burn calories while you do it, but you continue to burn slightly more calories than normal for up to 24 hours after your workout. It's not much, but every little bit helps – especially when you consider the effects over a long period of time.

When it comes to strength training, the biggest concern I hear – especially from women – is that strength training will make them bulky. And I understand the concern. When you feel too big, the last thing you want to do is get bigger from lifting weights, right? Well, you have nothing to worry about and here's why. One pound of muscle takes up about 2/3 the space of one pound of fat.

So even if you lost ten pounds of fat and gained ten pounds of muscle, you would still end up considerably smaller. But your appearance would dramatically improve because you would be leaner and have more muscle definition.

Here's something else for you ladies to consider. The main ingredients in muscle production are testosterone, total caloric intake, protein intake, exercise volume and genetics.

Women naturally have lower testosterone levels than men. So right away, it's going to be more difficult for women to get really muscular. “But what about those female bodybuilders” you ask? The fact is that many female...and male bodybuilders inject themselves with a variety of growth hormones to attain such epic proportions.

And if you talk to anyone involved in competitive bodybuilding, you'll find that it takes a great deal of time and effort to get that big and look that lean.

Competitors can spend upwards of two hours a day or more in training. Not to mention they are meticulous about their food intake. They measure everything. No calorie goes uncounted. So, for the average person who exercises ½ - 1 hour a day, who likes to sneak a few fries here and there, it's near impossible to look like a bodybuilder.

Rather than making you look bulky, strength training allows you to create strong, shapely muscles, giving you the ability to completely reshape your body. For example, let's say you have a pear shaped body, meaning you are heavier in the hips and legs than you are in the upper body. If you were just to lose weight without doing any strength training, you would end up skinnier, but would still be pear-shaped.

With strength training, you can broaden the shoulders, tighten the midsection, increase your chest size and firm the hips, legs and buttocks, creating a more visually balanced physique.

But here's one thing that strength training CAN'T do...

Strength training will not get rid of your belly...or "love handles" or your big butt or "thunder" thighs or your "saddle bags"! You see, there is no one specific exercise that can get rid of fat in a specific area of the body. Think about this for just a moment. Let's say your goal is to get rid of that "pooch" (that collection of fat just below the navel). Someone tells you that all you have to do is 200 stomach crunches a night to get rid of it. Here's the magic question:

How does your body know to get rid of fat just in that one spot? And...

If it could get rid of fat in just one spot, how funny would you look when you have a "ripped" set of abs but the rest of you has remained soft and marshmallow like?

Regardless of what your trouble spot is, here's how you get rid of it once and for all:

First, combine proper eating...with strength training...and...cardiovascular exercise. Then add in patience...persistence...and...consistency to get the body of your dreams.

To strengthen, firm and shape your muscles, all you need is to do 2-3 strength training workouts per week. And you should be able to complete a full-body workout in less than an hour. Often, much less.

Exercise Strategy #2: Turn Up The Intensity On Your Cardiovascular Exercise

In general, performing any activity which increases your heart rate and breathing for a prolonged period of time - usually fifteen minutes or more - can be categorized as aerobic.

Some of the more popular forms of cardiovascular exercise include...

- Walking
- Running
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Swimming
- Aerobic classes (cardio kickboxing, step, etc.)

Regardless of which type of exercise you choose, three factors will determine how many calories you burn:

- Frequency
- Intensity
- Time

Frequency refers to the number of exercise sessions performed in a given period of time, such as in one week or one month.

When you talk about exercise intensity, you are simply talking about how hard you are working in relation to your maximum capacity.

And time of course is how long you spend exercising.

For the most part, intensity and time have an inverse relationship, which means the higher your intensity level, the shorter your workout will be. Simply because your body can only work at a high level of intensity for so long before it tires. On the other hand, if you exercise at a lower intensity, you will be able to exercise for a longer period of time.

To demonstrate the relationship between intensity, time and the number of calories burned, think of it this way... The number of calories burned equals your intensity level multiplied by the time spent exercising.

Years ago, a study was done that suggested that doing cardiovascular exercise for long periods of time at a low intensity level burned a higher percentage of fat as opposed to exercising at higher intensities. While it may have been true, let me ask you a question:

Would you rather have 100% of my income or 10% of Bill Gates' income?

Without knowing me, I'm guessing that you would choose Bill Gates' income (no offense taken). But why? I'm offering 100% of my money. The fact is, 10% of Bill's money is way more than 100% of mine.

Here's my point. Yes, a larger percentage of the calories used during low-intensity exercise will be from fat, but you will burn a greater total of calories during moderate to high intensity exercise, which will in fact result in more TOTAL fat being used for energy.

So if you don't have a lot of time to spend exercising, simply work at a higher intensity level. If on the other hand, you don't care to work intensely, you must exercise longer...sometimes much longer to burn the same number of calories. For example, let's say that you burn 250 calories while walking for 45 minutes at a pace of 3 m.p.h. And say that at this speed you were working at a level 6 intensity. If you were to increase your intensity level to a 7 or 8, you may be able to burn the same 250 calories in 30 minutes or less.

To measure your intensity level, choose a number – on a scale of 1-10 – to represent how hard you feel you are working, with 10 being all-out effort.

Ideally, you want to be working at a level 7 or 8 for most of your workout. This ensures that you are burning the most possible calories. The great thing is this scale applies to you no matter how fit you are. You and I may have different fitness levels, but we can both work at the same intensity levels. So no matter how fit or unfit you may feel right now, you can aim to work at the proper intensity levels to promote more rapid fat loss.

Another benefit of higher intensity exercise is the “after-burn” effect. Simply put, you continue to burn calories for hours after your high-intensity exercise session is over. High intensity exercise speeds up your body's metabolism quickly and keeps it humming for some time after you finish exercising. Low intensity exercise on the other hand stops burning calories almost immediately after your session is done.

Working at a higher intensity level is great, but not if you only do it once and a while. Remember the other factor that affects how many calories you burn during your workouts and that's frequency. Start by doing some form of cardiovascular exercise three times per week. Depending on your goals, your fitness level and available time, you may want to increase the number of your cardio workouts to five or six per week.

With that said, let me warn you... You can't outrun your mouth. If you think exercise alone will shed those unwanted pounds, you're sadly mistaken. Poor nutritional habits will always outdo exercise. To demonstrate my point, consider that it takes 5 minutes or less to down a regular chocolate bar and to burn off those calories, you would have to walk about 45 minutes at a pace of 4 m.p.h.

Exercise Strategy #3: Time Your Exercise Just Right

When it comes to getting the most benefit from exercise, timing is everything.

It comes down to knowing how your body burns fat. When your blood sugar levels are high your body shuts down all fat-burning systems and uses the readily available sugar for fuel.

What raises your blood sugar levels? Sugar...also known as carbohydrate.

When you eat carbohydrates, they are broken down, through the digestive process, into a simple form of energy called...

Blood glucose...also known as blood sugar.

When your blood sugar rises, the body acts quickly to return it back to normal.

First it uses the excess sugar to meet current demands for energy. If you're active, such as working in the yard or chopping wood, the excess sugar is used to provide you with the energy you need for that activity.

Now if you're sitting on the couch, obviously your energy demands are low and your body moves to plan B. It attempts to store the excess blood glucose in your muscles and liver. However, the muscles and liver are limited in how much glucose they can store.

One thing that helps make it easier for your body to store more glucose is regular exercise. Exercise depletes the muscles of glucose. If you workout regularly, you are better prepared to deal with excess glucose, but if you don't exercise, your muscles will have very little room available for more incoming sugar. The third option then for dealing with excess sugar is to...

Convert it to fat.

This explains why, even on a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet, you can gain fat so easily. You simply exceed your body's ability to deal with all that sugar.

You see, when your blood sugar levels are at normal, your body gets about half of its energy from stored fat and half from stored glucose. But when your blood sugar goes up and insulin is released, all fat-burning stops until your blood sugar and insulin levels return to normal.

I've seen people who thought they were doing everything right end up fatter, more frustrated and depressed by their lack of progress. They would eat "special" cereal or low-fat yogurt in the morning, an apple for their snack, have a bowl of pasta for lunch and so on. They'd get home and walk on the treadmill for an hour and still not see any results. The reason is they aren't allowing their bodies to burn fat. Because they're burning sugar all day.

To get the best bang for your exercise buck, try to do your cardiovascular exercise first thing in the morning, when your blood sugar levels are depleted. This will allow the body to access stored fat more quickly.

If first thing in the morning is not possible, or you're not a "morning person", try to time your exercise 2-3 hours after a meal and avoid eating any types of carbs for an hour after.

Someone recently told me a story of their friend who walked on the treadmill every single day for an hour but wasn't losing any weight. When I asked about what the person ate or drank before or after the workout, it turns out the person was having a banana just prior to her walk. This surge of sugar into the body completely eliminated any chance she had of burning fat.

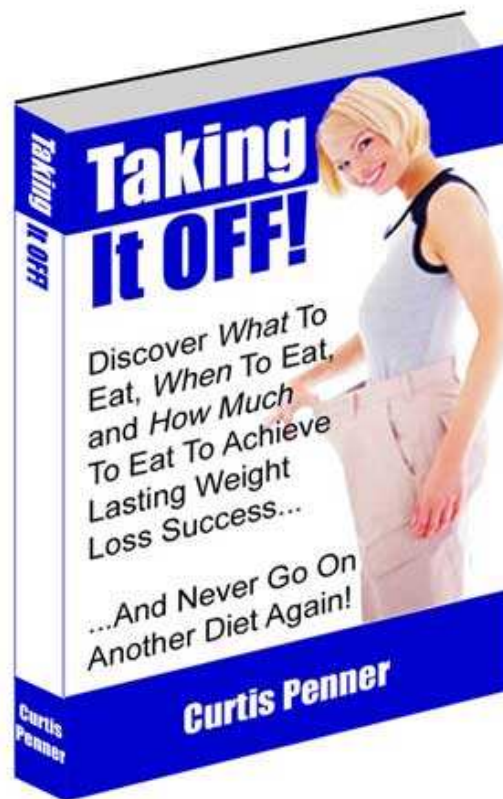
So, avoid eating any or drinking any type of carbs prior to or immediately after your cardiovascular workouts. The only exception to this rule is after strength training exercises.

Immediately after strenuous strength training your body craves protein and carbs so it's beneficial to have a meal consisting of protein and carbohydrate immediately after your strength-training workout.

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