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Start the New Year With Realistic Weight Loss Goals

With every New Year comes a set of new resolutions, many of which include losing weight and living a healthier life. Why not keep resolutions and make 2008 the healthiest year yet?

Millions of Americans will go on diets in the upcoming year. While some will succeed in taking the weight off, very few, perhaps 5 percent, will manage to keep all of it off in the long run. One reason for the slow success rate is many people look for quick and easy solutions to their weight problems and find it hard to believe in this age of scientific innovations and medical miracles that an effortless weight-loss method doesn't exist.

Being overweight or obese can have serious health consequences including increased risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, gallstones and some forms of cancer.

By losing as little as 10 percent of body weight can help reduce these risks. These general points are suggested to keep in mind:

- Any claim that you can lose weight effortlessly is false. The only proven way to lose weight is either to reduce the number of calories you eat or to increase the number of calories you burn off through physical activity. Many experts advise both.
- Very low-calorie diets are not without risk and should be pursued only under medical supervision. Unsupervised very low-calorie diets can deprive you of important nutrients and are potentially dangerous.
- Fad diets rarely have any permanent effect. Sudden and radical changes in eating patterns are difficult to sustain over time. In addition, so-called crash diets often send dieters into a cycle of quick weight loss, followed by rebound weight gain once normal eating resumes, with more difficulty reducing when the next diet is attempted.
- To lose weight safely and keep it off requires long-term changes in daily eating and exercise habits. Many experts recommend a goal of losing about 10 percent of body weight over six months or longer. A safe rate of weight loss is ½ pound to 2 pounds per week.
- Along with increasing physical activity, a modest reduction of 500 calories per day will achieve this goal, since a total reduction of 3,500 calories is required to lose a pound of fat.

Losing weight may not be effortless, but it doesn't have to be complicated. To achieve long-term results, it's best to avoid quick-fix schemes and complex regimens. Focus instead on making modest changes to life's daily routine.

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