

A New Year, A New Way To Look At Losing Weight

By Mitchell Yass PT

The New Year has arrived. Here come the resolutions to lose weight and get into shape. Try the same old weight loss diets and gimmicks? Isn't this getting old? Doesn't anyone realize that they don't work because they are not valid? It is time to set the record straight about weight loss and what it takes to control the amount of stored fat the body maintains. The answer to this question is one word; Metabolism. For most people this word is foreign or they know it somehow relates to the body. Few people understand what metabolism is and how it determines how much stored fat we keep on our bodies. I am here to spread the news that raising your metabolic rate causes the body to increase how much fat it utilizes every second of every day you are alive. Increased fat burning means increased utilization of the stored fat deposits you have all come to hate. Where most diet experts tell you to limit caloric intake, I am telling you that burning more calories over the course of the day is dramatically more efficient in controlling stored fat levels in the body. In fact, limiting caloric intake at a severe level may do more harm than good. If you reduce your caloric intake excessively, the body thinks you are going into starvation mode. It will actually slow down the metabolism of the body to coincide with the diminished caloric intake. Once the individual returns to a higher caloric intake, the body maintains the lower metabolic rate and a greater disparity between calories taken in and calories burned occurs. The individual starts to increase his fat deposits again and the weight begins to rise.

Let's define metabolism. Metabolism is the amount of energy necessary to sustain life at a resting state. Meaning, that when you are sitting in a chair or sleeping, your body is still functioning to keep you alive. You require circulation of blood to move oxygen and energy to all the cells of the body. This means your cardiovascular system must work as well as the pulmonary system to retrieve oxygen from the air we breath. Energy must be created from the foods we eat so the gastrointestinal system must work to breakdown the foods, process them and transfer the glucose to the circulatory system to be utilized by the cells of the body. The immune system is always working to prevent illness. These are examples of the activities taken place while at rest. For these systems to function, the organs performing these functions require energy. The energy source for this is fat. The body is comprised of millions of cells. Metabolism is the sum of the energy necessary to keep each cell alive. What if we were able to create more cells to keep us alive. Let's say for example that we defined your whole body as one cell. What if I were able to make another one cell equal in size to the first cell. It would take twice as much energy to keep the two cells alive. Therefore, I would have doubled my metabolism and required twice as much energy to sustain life. I would then be burning twice as much fat every second of the day. Fat deposits would just be melting away and you would see the number on the scale plummet. The question then becomes how can I make more cells to burn more calories. I can't make more lung or more kidney. I can't make more pancreas or more liver. But there is one tissue I can increase in size. And that tissue is muscle. I personally have put on about 40 pounds of muscle of my 18 years of weight lifting. Strength training will build muscle mass. More muscle mass means more cells to keep alive with oxygen and energy. All those systems have to work harder to keep that new tissue alive. And of course that means more fat to burn to provide that energy.

This is the missing piece of the puzzle when it comes to controlling weight. People have almost given fat a sense that it has a brain and that it controls how much of it exists. That it is feudal to try to control how much you weigh. Take emotion out of the equation and you will realize that your weight and fat content is based on a simple equation: how many calories your body burns versus how many calories you take in. Certainly, the amounts and types of calories you take in are a factor in this equation. The problem is that no one is looking at the other half of the equation. And it is this other half where the greater impact on the equation can take place.

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Now comes the \$64,000 question. Well now that I know I have to make more muscle to increase my metabolism to control my weight, how do I go about this? The answer is simple; strength training. Strength training utilizes the system of progressive weights to make muscles respond to increasing amounts of resistance. The increasing amounts of resistance cause the muscles to develop more muscle mass to accommodate for the increased stress of the greater resistance. Isolated strength training means that you will perform exercises for individual muscles to maximize your chances of building muscle mass and increasing your metabolism. Some people will ask if cardiovascular activities such as walking, bicycling or using a treadmill are as effective in helping losing weight. The answer is no. Although the amount of calories burned during the activities just described are greater than a bout of weight training due to a greater rise in metabolic rate, the metabolic rate returns to the original rate immediately after completing the activity. With strength training, as muscle mass increases, the metabolic rate remains higher all the time, never decreasing as long as the increased muscle mass is sustained. Therefore, the increased in burned calories exists not just for the 45 minutes or the 1-hour of the activity but a full 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The common reason people do not start strength training programs is because they think they are going to hurt themselves. This is nonsense. If the proper techniques are utilized and proper weight is incorporated, there is nothing better for the body than strength training. Women don't have to worry about getting as big as a man because they don't have as much testosterone as men and therefore cannot build the amount of muscle as men have. There is no age range that is good for starting strength training. I have a woman at my physical therapy and personal training facility who starting lifting weights at age 64. She is now seventy. She has the bone density of a woman 25 to 40 years old. She has no aches or pains associated with growing older. She has no problem controlling her weight. And best of all she feels great about how she looks and how she feels.

The New Year has just begun. Take a new look at an old problem. Incorporate strength training into your weight loss program. I guarantee your results will be a lot better than just sucking on a carrot stick.

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