

I'm just gonna eat less!

The world's worst weight-loss resolution

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EATING LESS. Is that your weight-loss plan? You're simply going to learn to eat less? You're always going to choose smaller portions? You're going to cut back? That's your plan? That's it?

Well, if it were that easy, do you think you'd still have weight to lose? If it were that easy, I'd be working in an emergency room somewhere instead of in a bariatric clinic. Because if all it took to lose weight was for people to simply decide to eat less, the world would be skinny.

But it's more complicated than that. Ultimately, what we choose to put on our plates reflects a sort of personal homeostasis, or needs balance. What I mean is that the amount of food we consume, quite literally how much we put on our plates, is as much food as we feel we need to be satisfied. And I'm not just talking about satisfying physiologic hunger needs, I'm also talking about our very human psychological and hedonistic food needs.

If you simply try to cut back without making any formative changes to the actual foods you eat — the distribution of your protein, carbohydrates and fats and/or the timing of your meals and snacks — all you're likely going to wind up doing is battling hunger,

and your needs — physical, psychological and hedonistic — will likely not be met. Battle that hunger long enough and you're likely to feel short-changed and bitter and, soon enough, you'll probably abandon your overly simplified resolution.

If you want to lose weight and, more important, keep it off for good, you actually need to like living your life with fewer calories. In order to do that, you're probably going to need to reformat your dietary organization so that you're using food in a manner that actually changes your needs, leading to less hunger and, consequently, more control. My 10 cardinal rules for this transition remain the same.

1. Have breakfast within 60 minutes of waking up.
2. Eat every two or three hours.
3. Have meals with a minimum of 300 calories for women and 400 calories for men.
4. Choose snacks with a minimum of 100 calories for women and 150 calories for men.
5. Include eight or more grams of protein with every snack and 15 grams with every meal.

6. Limit refined and processed foods to the smallest amounts you need to be happy.

7. Drink only as many calories as you need to enjoy your life (i.e., minimize your intake of juices, milk and alcoholic and sugared beverages).

8. Drink only water when you exercise for less than 40 minutes. If you exercise for more than 40 minutes, add 100 carbohydrate-based calories per 40-minute block, to be consumed immediately before, during or right after exercise.

9. Know that there is no such thing as a forbidden food. Food plays a legitimate hedonistic role in life, too, so you deserve to indulge yourself occasionally.

10. Always, always, always, consider the caloric consequences of your dietary decisions. Calories are the currency of weight, and if you think that looking at price tags when shopping is a good idea, invest in a calorie counter and read your calories.

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