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Top tips for weight management

What are the key things we can do to be the healthiest and the happiest we can be, over the long term?

Get strong

This is one of the most important and under-appreciated points for managing weight over the long term. In recent times, there's been a movement away from exercise as being important for fat loss. There's probably a good reason for that - a number of studies have shown that the benefits of some types of activity were pretty ineffective for fat loss. But what we need to remember is that we're not talking about exercise in isolation. Nutrition is always going to be the biggest factor, but exercise is a critically important part of the picture.

Strength is the missing factor for a lot of people. If we're stronger, we're going to be healthier. We're going to be healthier in later age. We're going to hold more muscle, which is critically important because muscle is more metabolically active. It's burning calories all day.

Being strong is also very important for bone health and for insulin-sensitivity.

Take a step-wise approach to starting. It could be as simple as doing a set of pushups and a set of squats in the morning, and then adding one repetition of those each day. The idea is that we just start and then build incrementally over time to get stronger and stronger, because that will have a big effect.



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Be mindful

Mindfulness is recognised as being a critical part of health nowadays. The reasons are multifactorial. We have bi-directional relationships between our mental state and sleep. Sleep also affects the food choices we make and the food choices we make affect sleep. Mindfulness affects stress. Stress affects mindfulness. Stress affects sleep. Sleep is known to affect the gut microbiome. The gut microbiome is known to affect sleep and stress.

One of the ways we can be more mindful, so that we can sleep better, be less stressed or more stress-resilient, so that we can recognise when we are in the moment, is through meditation. Starting a meditative practice is very important.

Sounds easy enough, but how do we do that? Often if we launch into doing things 'too much, too soon', we fall off the wagon because we don't have the time, energy or inclination. So again, a sequential approach where maybe we're starting out with some mindful activity or meditation, starting out at a minimal level, and then building on that over time to encourage the habit of doing it.

Go for a walk

Something that can help with mindfulness is just going for a walk. Walk and being more active through the day is a critical part of burning calories and energy, which helps with energy balance and weight maintenance. But more so, it's critically important for breathing, improving posture and reducing stress. All of these things have a big interplay with the other lifestyle factors that help us to maintain healthy body composition, long-term.



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Focus on quality of food

Now we're going to get into some nutrition stuff. Focus first and foremost on the quality of food you're eating - eat more natural, unrefined foods. Ultra-refined food isn't very satiating and it drives people to want to eat more and not be able to regulate their energy balance. Unrefined foods are more nutrient-dense, have more of the essential vitamins and minerals and secondary nutrients, which are health-promoting and helping you to auto-regulate your energy intake.

Eat like you mean it

This idea that we snack and graze through the day has been really counterproductive for people because snacking is typically related to poorer food choices. It has a direct association with obesity and metabolic disorder. We know that from the evidence.

When we instead focus on eating meals, and eating until we're actually full, we begin to reconnect with the proper satiety and hunger signals in the body. We're better able to auto-regulate our energy intake, without necessarily having to count calories or macros all the time. So, eat like you mean it and also eat when you're hungry - wait until you're actually hungry.

Be active



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If we're active and doing stuff, we shouldn't be eating. Because in that stage we're in the fight or flight response - sympathetic nervous system dominance - where we're not very good at digesting and assimilating food anyway. We're better to be active, be out doing stuff, which in a natural environment would probably be finding food. And then when we find it, when we have a chance to relax in the modern world, to sit down and eat. Eat until we're full and then wait again until we're hungry and learn what hunger and satiety actually mean again.

Base every meal on protein

Protein is one of the keys for the body because everything in the body is made out of protein. The building blocks of protein are amino acids. Protein supports muscle, and this is important for weight maintenance. A higher protein diet has been shown to improve our body composition. It's also the most satiating nutrient. When we base our meals on a foundation of protein, we're making sure that we're more satiated and that helps us to regulate our energy intake.

Eat your vegetables

My final tip is to eat at least two fist-size servings of vegetables at every meal, because these are satiating by nature of their bulk. The more we eat, there are biochemical factors that signal satiety. There are two aspects to satiety, or satisfaction, from food. There's the biochemical aspect, the signals within the body, and there's also the effects of the enteric nervous system, which reads the contraction and expansion of the gut tissue. So if we have large amounts of food



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going through, that signals to the body, "Yeah, I'm satisfied. Now, I've had enough."

We come from a situation in which we were demanding food from an environment that was relatively calorie-sparse. And now we have an environment that's very calorie-dense, so we need to be aware of that, which is why our food and psychosocial environment is so critical to look at in concert.