



St. Michael Catholic Church

WEIGHT LOSS FOR HEALTH

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Our society places high value on looking "good", being "thin" and otherwise being physically attractive. On the other hand, all kinds of food are plentiful, affordable and accessible. With the advent of high sugar drinks and fried fast food, we consume too many calories and exercise too little! Becoming overweight in our society is easy, and Americans, as a whole, are becoming more and more overweight and even obese. Over the centuries the human body, back to times of food scarcity, has become an efficient food storage organism. So we have the polar opposites of food availability and the desired norm is thin.

What is absent from this outlook is GOOD HEALTH! Carrying around an extra 25, 40, or even 100 or more pounds is hard on our joints and other major organs--heart, lungs, kidneys and liver. It can also be a major factor in sleep disturbances (like sleep apnea). We experience more energy and are less inclined to develop high blood pressure and diabetes if we maintain a normal weight. Being of normal weight is just plain better for our bodies and health (and our spirit and outlook on life as well)!

How can we be motivated to lose weight? As Catholics, we believe that our bodies are "temples of the Holy Spirit". That reason alone should help motivate us to take care of our bodies; to enable good health and good function. There's nothing wrong with wanting to look and feel better either. To be able to again wear clothing you've "outgrown" can be a good motivator as well. Gaining support from a friend, spouse or clinic can be very helpful too.

An excellent resource for information and motivation is Dr. A'S Habits of Health; the Path to Permanent Weight Control and Optimal Health, by Dr. Wayne Scott Anderson (available at amazon.com). Dr. Anderson is a medical doctor and has lived the experience of being overweight and unhealthy, losing the weight, becoming healthier and keeping the weight off. Another excellent resource is Eat Well Live Well, by Pamela M. Smith, R.D. This resource emphasizes the basics of good nutrition to maintain good health with her "Ten Commandments of Great Nutrition" (also available on amazon.com).

There are several methods by which to lose weight. Strictly counting calories does work. Remember, carbohydrates and proteins are 4 cal. / gm.; fats are 9 cal. / gm. and alcohol is 7 cal. / gm. But even with calorie counting the human body's capacity to "save" itself by lowering body metabolism causes weight loss to plateau.

There are programs where you purchase the meals and just eat these meals. The advantage to this method is that one just follows the regime and weight loss occurs. The disadvantage is that one does not learn the basics of choosing healthy foods, and weight goes back on when returning to our old eating habits.

There's also the weight watchers method in which one joins a group, learns to use "points" to regulate food intake to lose weight, and gains support from the group to stick to the plan. Many people have good success with this program as they learn to make better food choices.

Over the years, many people have had successful weight loss with a low carbohydrate diet. However, if one focuses on strictly restricting all carbohydrates, the diet becomes so unreasonable that it's difficult to comply and stick with it.

More recently, weight loss focuses on high protein, low fat, cut out the empty carbohydrates (sugar and refined starches) but with emphasis on "good" carbohydrates - those with low sugar/starch nature (low glycemic index). It also requires eating 5-6 times/day with just 1 or 2 "meals" and the rest consisting of calorie controlled snacks. This diet keeps fat content low with emphasis on small amounts of "healthy" fats (olive oil and avocado). The high protein is necessary to maintain body muscle!

The importance of drinking water cannot be overemphasized! Even a healthy person of normal weight needs 6-8 (8 oz.) glasses of water each day to maintain good health. When weight loss dieting, increase water intake to 8-12 glasses/day. The water is needed to dilute and flush out the end products of burning fat. These 8-12 glasses should be mostly straight water, as liquids like tea and coffee and sodas tend to cause the body to lose extra water and put the water balance of the body in a negative state.

While on a weight reduction diet, one needs strategies to stay committed to the diet. It's too easy to become discouraged and quit dieting. Strict adherence to the diet is very important! Getting a friend, a spouse, or a clinic to support you in your weight loss efforts can be very helpful. A regular "weigh-in" to assess progress is beneficial. A graph to chart progress can also be helpful. Short term or long term goals can be helpful if they are realistic. If you "eat out" for a special occasion or celebration, be willing and educated to make good selection choices. (E.g. forgo the bread, pasta, potato and dessert as well as high fat foods) Enlist the waitress to "change" your ordered meal to comply with your dietary regime.

Exercise is important in weight loss, but if one relies totally on exercise to lose weight, it will be a long, arduous process. To lose one pound of fat, one would have to run in excess of 33 miles to burn those 3600 to 4000 calories. It's best to remain active with moderate exercise (esp. walking) and then after the goal weight has been achieved, focus on a toning program to build and strengthen muscles.

Many people have struggled and lost weight, and then regain the weight again in the successive years, plus some extra pounds. The key to not regaining the lost weight is changing one's eating habits and not returning to the previous habits that caused the weight gain to occur in the first place. Learn to eat healthy and enjoy what you eat. Eat slowly and stop once you feel "full". If you use food as "comfort", you need to focus on small amounts of healthy food and retrain to get your "comfort" from non-calorie sources--an enjoyable hobby, a nice walk, or connect with a friend. Yoga participation can be a stress reliever. A good dessert can be a favorite fresh fruit. A craving for chocolate can be assuaged with a few (4-6) chocolate dusted almonds.

If you have a serious chronic disease such as diabetes or gout or if you need to lose a large amount of weight (25# or more) you should consult your doctor and follow his or her directions in your weight loss effort.

Happy Healthy Dieting!