



The Scale Doesn't Lie - or does it?

Think you can step on a scale for an objective measurement? Not so fast! Those numbers are less reliable than you might think. Ultimately, healthy habits matter the most.

Scales are tricky. If you eat wisely for a few weeks but don't lose any weight, it can make you think you are doing something wrong and feel like giving up—but don't give up yet.

Many things affect weight. Shifts in water content have a big impact. Carbohydrates release water during metabolism, so when you eat more carbs you weigh more. Conversely, your weight can drop dramatically when you cut carbs out; but it's only water. Hydration, stool collecting in your intestines, and fluid gains during menses all impact scale weight.

Another variable is body composition. When you lose weight quickly, you lose muscle along with the fat. Then when you gain weight back, it is mostly fat. So as your weight yo-yo's up and down, an increasing amount of your weight is fat instead of muscle. The weight on a scale is not the whole story!

Even if you are eating well and losing weight, chances are you don't think it is fast enough. Popular diets have ruined us – we don't think we are being successful unless we lose several pounds a week. But this is not a reasonable expectation. Wishing for quick weight loss is a set up for disappointment (or unhealthy approaches). Losing half a pound to one pound *most* weeks is a more realistic expectation.

I don't believe that all calories are equal, and I'll explain that later, but it is still helpful to look at the basic mathematics. It takes an additional 3500 calories to gain a pound, and a deficit of that same amount to lose a pound. If you cut back 500 calories a day, in theory you should lose a pound a week.

Cutting back 500 calories a day can be reasonable for men, and indeed men generally lose weight faster than women because they have more muscle and other metabolic differences. But a calorie reduction of 500 calories is too much for most women, especially short women: cut back 250 calories a day for a half pound weight loss per week. In theory.

The reality is always a little more sketchy. I find that there is often a delay in weight loss. Sometimes you need to change your habits for a period of time before you see changes in weight. A calorie is not a just a calorie; content matters.



Food is information. Some foods trigger metabolic pathways that are inflammatory, while other foods set healthy pathways into motion. Our highly refined, processed diet sets us up for insulin resistance and makes weight loss more difficult – at any calorie level. Whole foods, especially fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein, create optimal body chemistry.

We don't really know why some people can't seem to lose weight no matter what they eat. One theory is that food allergies or intolerances are to blame. I find that some people who crave bread and pasta do much better when they eliminate flour from their diet – even the whole grain varieties. They stop craving it and will often lose weight more easily.

Some scientists blame difficult weight loss on imbalances in gut bacteria. We also know that people have different levels of appetite hormones and sensitivity to the opium-like effects of sugar-fat-and-salt. Over time research will help us understand the full impact of these factors; in the meantime, these are generally improved with a whole-foods diet.

Eating too little isn't the answer. The body is designed to conserve energy when necessary for survival, so if your calories drop too low, your metabolism also drops and you need even less calories to maintain the same weight. There is no value in this; too few calories makes it hard to meet nutritional needs.

What is the bottom line? I say go ahead and weigh yourself, but don't take the number too seriously. Pay more attention to how you feel, create healthy habits that you can live with and choose healthy foods in reasonable amounts. Good fuel promotes optimal health and wellbeing.

Exercise: Just Do It!

Are you too busy or too tired to exercise? Begin by setting aside just 10 to 15 minutes a day to walk. That's it. The initial goal is to make it part of your day, and 10 minutes is easy to fit in no matter what else is going on. Once you get started, exercise has a tendency to grow naturally.

When you exercise, tune in to how you feel. Chances are it gives you a little more energy, helps reduce your stress level and makes you feel happy. It's better than medicine, and it's free. All you have to do is get started and pay attention.

Recipe for the Month

Bok Choy Frittata (make with any veggies!)

Click the links to the recipe, or find them on my blog at www.HealthyHabitsCoach.wordpress.com.

Creating Healthy Habits

Even when you know what to do, it's challenging to make healthy habits a regular part of your life. It is so much easier with help. Contact me via kathy@healthyhabitscoach.com

Kathy Nichols: Life Coach & Registered Dietitian

Are you ready to stop dieting and looking for a way of eating that is sustainable, enjoyable and healthy?

Discover Wellness from the Inside Out!

