

Moderation is the be-all and end-all

Moderation is always the key, not only in eating, but in controlling weight. While too much chocolate cake may make a person think of losing weight, it's important to understand how too much dieting and exercise can lead to problems as well.

According to Robert Hackman, associate professor of School and Community Health, "Losing weight is an outdated mode of thinking. You really want to normalize your body weight by increasing muscle mass and losing fat mass, not necessarily by losing pounds on the scale."

A person needs at least 1000 calories a day, 70 percent of which should be carbohydrates like whole grains, beans, starchy vegetables, and fruits, Hackman said. "If you go below that, the body starts producing fat because it thinks it's being starved."

One problem with diets is that people focus on the negative rather than the positive. "If people think of what they are supposed to be eating, it takes attention away from what they are not supposed to be eating," Hackman said.

Normalizing weight does not only involve a change in diet, but a change in exercise habits as well. Hackman said that a progressive walking program is usually the best choice for exercise, but that results might take time, as long as three to four months.

While maintaining a proper body weight and exercising are important, carrying a fitness and diet plan to extremes can be damaging, instead of beneficial, to one's health.

The most compelling argument against taking in too few calories, Hackman said, is that there is a likelihood of the person's biochemistry being 'programmed' to store fat. "That's the irony of it all," Hackman said. "Diets can make you fat for the rest of your life."

In addition, repeated severe dieting can deplete the biochemical reserves in the body that would ordinarily be used for extra energy, resulting in lowered energy levels.

Excess energy can be dangerous to the body as well. If a person is chronically fatigued or not sleeping well, has an elevated heart rate or temperature, and has trouble concentrating, Hackman said, the person is probably not re-

In the long run, decreased estrogen levels can affect bone strength, causing bones to weaken and possibly dissolve.

Excessive dieting causes a damaging psychological pat-

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-Robert Hackman

covering sufficiently from exercise. Furthermore, chances are that the person is exercising too much.

Excess energy has even more severe effects in women. Short term overexercise can result in a drop in estrogen levels, which can halt menstruation and otherwise disrupt the female hormone cycle.

tern in a person as well, Hackman said. "A person starts to think, 'Through deprivation and an imbalanced, unhealthy approach, I can reach my goals and become someone,' instead of 'I already am someone, and I choose to engage in healthful lifestyle practices.'"

-Meg Dedolph

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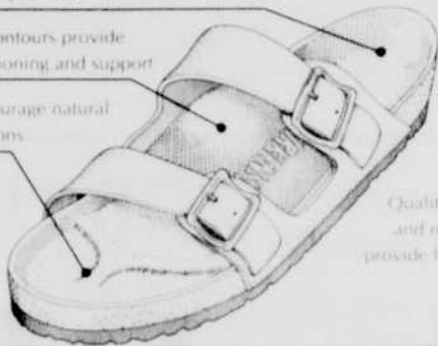
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