

Last week I began an article series to discuss the complex topic of weight loss. I covered the basics of how and why fat is stored in the body. This week I will discuss diets.

Most Americans, especially American women, know that several times a year a new diet fad erupts. Most of these fads are simple retrofits of previous fads with a new name and a new doctor or nutritionist hawking the unique benefits of the program. Americans are so desperate for an easy and effective way to lose weight, that many will try and believe anything. If these diets worked, then we should have the thinnest population on the planet rather than the heaviest.

The simple fact is that diets don't work! In fact, recent research shows that not only do they not work, but they actually lead to weight gain. Research demonstrates that while many people lose weight on diets, when they end the diet most regain more weight than they lost.

Many believe that their most recent dieting failure was a problem with the diet itself. They are then eager to try the next one that comes along. Some simply give up and resign themselves to a life of excess weight, or they begin to consider surgery which we will talk about in a future column. The fact is that diets don't work because the dieter either gives up prematurely, returns to the same poor eating habits that contributed to the original weight gain once a target weight has been achieved, or in rare cases the diet was simply bogus.

For a diet to be effective it must accomplish one thing – sufficient calorie reduction. That can be accomplished by changing the type of food eaten or the quantity or usually both. The more the calories are reduced, the faster the weight will be lost.

Some people get discouraged because they see an initial weight loss that then levels out and they go for a time without losing any additional weight even though they are still restricting their calories. This happens because the body adapts to the reduced food consumption by altering the metabolism. It may be necessary to reduce the calorie consumption even further to spur additional weight loss.

I often hear people tell me that they can't lose weight. In truth everyone **can** lose weight. People die from starvation because first the fat is all burned up, then most of the muscle tissue is burned up, finally the body begins to burn the muscles and tissues that make up the organs. Eventually the body becomes so depleted that it can no longer function. Restrict calories enough for a long enough period of time and the fat in the body will be exhausted.

I am not recommending starvation as an effective weight loss method. I am simply making a point that with enough calorie restriction, weight will be lost. I will talk about appropriate weight loss methods later in this series.