

The focus of the last few articles has been about different issues relating to losing weight. Diet fads, weight loss pills, and surgeries will come and go. The most popular ones are those that promise easy weight loss. These methods fade from popularity when the promises aren't fulfilled. They aren't fulfilled, because they either don't work, they only work temporarily, or they have unpleasant side effects.

The simple fact is that weight is gained when more calories are consumed than burned. Weight is lost when the opposite occurs. Diets work when they in effect reduce calorie consumption. Weight loss pills work when they increase the rate of calorie burn or they reduce the appetite to reduce calorie consumption or they reduce calorie absorption. Weight loss surgery works by reducing calorie consumption.

All of these mechanisms can work, but they are rarely permanent solutions and many carry significant side effects. There are many weight loss short cuts, but there is no short cut to a permanent weight loss. Permanent weight loss requires permanent changes to calorie consumption and calorie usage.

If you are interested in achieving a permanent lower body weight, then you must either adopt different eating habits or adopt a more active lifestyle or ideally both. The greater change that you make the more weight you will lose. There are dozens of strategies for reducing calorie consumption. I will share as many of them with you as I can in this and next week's column.

What I want to share with you this week is how to deal with hunger. Hunger is a sensation that your body generates when it believes you need to eat. In reality, most of us have enough stored energy in the form of fat that we could go weeks without eating and not run out of energy. That doesn't mean we wouldn't run out of nutrients, so I am not suggesting that you go on a multi-week fast. You could, however, cut out nearly all calorie consumption for weeks and you would be healthier in the end.

Hunger was a necessary survival mechanism when food was more scarce. It motivated us to trudge out in the cold and find some type of food. That is no longer an issue, yet many of us still interpret the hunger drive as a survival emergency. How many times have you said the phrase "I am starving." when in fact you were just hungry? Hunger is a sensation, just as a smell is a sensation. How often have you gone into a room with an unpleasant smell and after a short while you don't notice the smell so much any more? The same effect can happen with hunger.

When most of us get hungry, the hunger sensation dominates our consciousness until we satisfy it. You can choose not to be ruled by hunger. The next time you are hungry, simply acknowledge the sensation, tell yourself that there is no survival emergency and although you are hungry, you are not ready to eat. Then put the sensation in the back of your mind and focus on the activity that you are currently involved in. You may find your hunger creeping back into the forefront of your consciousness from time to time and when you do simply acknowledge it and push it back again. Do this enough and you will develop the ability to control your hunger without medication.

Next week I will discuss other weight loss strategies. Stay tuned.