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Effective Weight Loss: 3 Strategies To Help

James B. LaValle, RPh, CCN

When it comes to physical health, the biggest challenge people face today is the ability to maintain a healthy weight. Our “easy food” environment combined with the fact that we don’t *need* to exert much physical activity in our activities of daily living has led to a situation where even when people exercise for an hour three days a week, it does not lead to weight loss or even do a good job of preventing weight gain in many cases. In fact, a large review article on this topic recently concluded that this situation is of such great concern, the authors of that article wish that we would just uncouple this “Eat less, and exercise more” message and just flat out tell people that in order to be effective in managing weight the focus should be on eating less.¹

Another line of thought is that while diet and physical activity are certainly key issues, there are many other factors influencing weight in people, including environmental toxins and estrogens, the influence of neurotransmitters which are affected by issues such as stress, the role of sleep or rather lack of it, and even things like the addictive qualities of refined foods are being evaluated. So in other words, we finally have obesity experts looking at a multifactorial approach for weight loss, and this is the approach that I have taken in my own clinical practice for 30 years. When people come to my clinic, we do a thorough evaluation of every area influencing metabolism, whether the person is insulin resistant, if their thyroid function is optimal, their stress level and if they’re sleeping, and even gut health because it also influences inflammation levels and appetite.

Then we put together comprehensive programs, and in most cases, they are very effective for weight loss. As I work with clients over the years however, I have tried to develop what I think are easy strategies that people can employ, even if they don’t have access to a practitioner for a more comprehensive metabolic program.

Carbohydrate Control

1. Eat fewer refined sugar and flours. This is one of the major factors promoting a dysglycemic state after meals that promote insulin resistance, the condition that keeps us from being able to properly lower blood sugar after meals. By far, it is not just the amount of calories that people are taking in but it’s the type of calories they are consuming that is influencing health and weight so dramatically. There is no question, the less sugar and refined flours you can take in, the better for not just weight, but for other risks like diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. The best strategy is to swap out vegetables and fruits for these foods. So instead of a slice of white bread with your meal eat a salad, in place of a big pile of pasta, eat a large serving of broccoli or green beans. Instead of desert, eat a piece of fruit.

2. Portion Control—If you do eat high glycemic load foods, like pasta, rice, bread and potatoes, eat smaller portions. That’s good advice, yet despite our best intentions, even when people try to cut portions of unhealthy foods, they still overeat them. That’s one reason I’ve become a fan of a nutritional

supplement made from white bean extract, called *phaseolus vulgaris*. It’s marketed now as Phase 2. Phase 2 blocks the digestion and absorption of starch in starchy foods like breads, pastas, cereals, potatoes, rice, corn and other grains, without significantly affecting nutritional status and with no side effects. In a 12-week trial that compared weight loss results, the group that used Phase 2 lost about seven pounds in 12 weeks, versus two pounds in the placebo group. Both groups were put on a slight calorie deficit diet that contained about 40 percent carbohydrate, which is a somewhat carb reduced diet. So, reducing portions, but using Phase 2 to block digestion led to much greater weight loss, than a lower carb somewhat reduced calorie diet alone. Also, the subjects taking Phase 2 lost significantly more waist circumference and all the weight

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loss was from fat loss, so this means they’re losing the weight you want them to lose, the high-risk (visceral) belly fat. Finally, over 70 percent of the subjects maintained their weight loss over the next 12 weeks, and that’s what we’re really looking for is the ability to maintain the weight loss. Interestingly the FDA has allowed for claims for weight management with this ingredient, which is unheard of for dietary supplements. →

Stress Management/Sleep

1. Control stress—Chronic high stress leads to several issues that can dramatically affect weight, like the ability to sleep. Chronic stress can cause something called hyperarousal, which is an inverted cortisol pattern. Cortisol should be highest in the morning and should drop over the course of the day, but with high stress instead of dropping it can gradually increase over the day, and that will affect the ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. High stress also reduces thyroid hormone utilization, and conversion to the most active thyroid hormone T₃.

2. Sleep—Sleeping is critical for weight management because when we don't sleep, we start to become more insulin resistant and we get changes in hunger hormone that makes us get hungrier and crave high carb foods. So to help this area, I recommend using strategies for stress management such as meditation and yoga and/or adaptogenic herbs that have been shown to reduce the stress response in the body. Proven nutrients include rhodiola, holy basil and Relora. Then use melatonin at bedtime.

Food Quality/Detox Support

For years, I've emphasized that environmental toxins could be a significant factor contributing to weight issues and now there are studies that prove it. Not only can toxins induce insulin resistance, they can slow thyroid function. In fact, one study found that release of toxins from fat tissue might be why we hit plateaus after losing a few pounds.² For this reason, it's important to reduce exposures to chemicals where we can and to make sure our bodies can detoxify well.

1. Eat Clean Food—The goal is to reduce your intake of pesticides and other chemicals that have been shown to disrupt metabolism. A study from 2007 looked at several different types of toxins called persistent organic pollutants. While all six of the toxins they evaluated were associated with increased insulin resistance, the two most strongly associated with insulin resistance, and therefore with weight gain and diabetes, were organochlorine pesticides (a class of chemicals used on foods) and PCB's,³ chemicals that are found in high amounts in farm-raised fish. To reduce exposure to these chemicals buy organic or sustainably raised produce and avoid farm-raised fish and opt for wild caught.

2. Support Detoxification Pathways in the Body—Phase 1 and Phase 2 detox pathways in the liver require multiple nutrients, including vitamin C and flavonoids, B vitamins, choline, magnesium, zinc, manganese, vitamin E, selenium and other antioxidants, and several amino acids and sulfur compounds. To obtain all the nutrients needed, we need a nutrient dense diet that includes all kinds of vegetables and greens, especially cruciferous vegetables, berries and other fruits, high biologic value proteins, sulfur compound containing onions and garlic, and nuts and seeds just for starters. Because it's hard to eat nutrient dense all the time and especially hard to take in high quantities of the foods, I think it's helpful to use supplements

that help with detox, especially supplements that can help build glutathione and others like chlorella that can help remove heavy metals.

Using this 1-2-3 punch of lowered glycemic load intake, addressing stress and sleep, and supporting our body with organic foods and detox nutrients, we can address three big areas concerning our ability to lose weight and keep it off. ■

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