

An Anti-Diet for A New Year

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By the time this article reaches you, we'll be a few weeks into the new year and the word resolution may be heard a little less frequently - thank goodness, right?! Maybe you're a resolution person or maybe not, but either way, a lot of people are thinking about making some changes in the new year. And you almost have to live under a rock not to have been exposed to targeted marketing aimed at weight loss. Weight loss is probably THE most common new year's resolution and this becomes a huge money-maker for the diet industry. But is it the healthiest choice for you?

Having and working towards goals is a great way to accomplish many things. If you want to save money, you can set a goal, put a little aside every week and eventually meet your goal. Losing weight is not such a simple endeavor. Weight loss is complicated by the many hormonal mechanisms that favor maintaining the status quo. Which means losing weight is typically not a linear journey. Sometimes people lose a little weight, plateau, then gain it back or maybe they don't lose any weight despite their best efforts. This lack of results contributes to many people "failing" at or giving up their resolutions year after year. They may blame their willpower or whatever program they used when these aren't actually the problem. The problem was a resolution that is somewhat arbitrarily defined and defies our basic biology.

What is your ideal weight? Does science support that number? When people resolve to lose weight, they often have a target weight in mind. These targets may be based on many factors. Prior body weight and BMI are common rationales given for a goal of weight loss. Media-driven beauty standards and the currently accepted body type are also an influence. There are many known problems with BMI including that it does not take into account relevant differences based on sex, race, and body composition. BMI will falsely assign a heavy muscular body a designation of obese, for example.



Changing your body weight based on prior weight or beauty standards doesn't necessarily guarantee that you'll maintain that weight or be particularly healthier. In fact, there is evidence that losing weight, particularly through calorie restriction, may predispose your body not only to gaining more weight, but also to putting on more body fat. The result is weight cycling - increasing and decreasing body weight - which can contribute to increases in body fat percentage, inflammation, and disease risk over time. And for those hoping to exercise their way into a smaller body, the research is clear and exercise does not predictably result in weight loss, though it does result in improved health!

It IS worth working towards a healthier diet and increased physical activity regardless of the impact on body weight. In a body at any weight, a healthier diet and regular exercise reliably improve health and decrease disease risk. This can look different, depending on where you are starting from, and sustainability is vital. So this year, consider building healthy habits that nourish you, like eating a few more vegetables, finding an exercise routine you actually like, and letting go of an outdated resolution that may not be serving you.

As always, I'm here to help. I wish you peace, health, happiness, and prosperity in the new year and always.



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