

ARE YOUR WEIGHT-LOSS EFFORTS SABOTAGING YOUR HEALTH?

Dropping pounds can change your life. But beware of the unexpected side effects of your methods.

by Joanna Powell

OH, THE BENEFITS OF LOSING WEIGHT! Not only will you look sleeker and feel more confident—and have an excuse to buy a new wardrobe—but shedding even a modicum of body fat can boost energy, end mental fog and improve a myriad health issues. In fact, dropping just five to 10 percent of one's body weight has been shown to lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, cancer and depression.

With such a payoff on the horizon, many of us will try just about anything to maximize weight loss. After all, the end result justifies whatever means necessary, right? Not always. In the effort to lower our BMIs, many of us make the mistake of employing methods—from strict calorie counting to overdoing meal replacements—that can actually sabotage our general well-being. "When dieting," cautions Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, author of *From Fatigued to Fantastic!* (Avery, 2007), "one can aggravate fatigue, pain and other problems [that can result] from nutritional deficiencies." Or—worse yet—regain the weight (and then some) and end up with a slower metabolism, which a 2016 study found happened to 14 *Biggest Loser* contestants.

Moreover, adults who are overweight or obese "often make common mistakes that can delay their progress or negatively impact other aspects of their health," notes Caroline Passerello, MS, RDN, LDN, spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. While Passerello advocates seeking counseling from a registered dietitian when undertaking a weight-loss regimen, these are some surprisingly basic blunders that every dieter should be aware of—and avoid!

DIET SABOTEUR #1: YOU OBSESSIVELY TRACK CALORIES IN VERSUS CALORIES OUT.

If you can't eat a single bite without tallying your meal math, you may want to consider a less dated

approach. "Your body is not a bank account, it's a chemistry lab!" quips best-selling diet guru JJ Virgin, CNS, CHFS, author of the *Sugar Impact Diet* (Grand Central Life and Style, 2016). In other words, the problem with foods that make people fat isn't simply that they have too many calories. It's that they cause a metabolic response in the body that causes us to store fat and overeat (think processed carbs like crackers, soda and even white rice). On the other hand, high-quality foods—fresh fruits and veggies, lean proteins, healthy fats—rev up the metabolism and keep our systems humming.

Obsessive calorie counting—and food weighing, for that matter—can also amp stress levels, which in turn produce the stress hormone cortisol. Study after study links cortisol to increased storage of belly fat—the worst kind. In 2000, researchers at Yale University, for example, found that slender women who had high cortisol levels also carried more abdominal fat.

BOTTOM LINE: "When it comes to eating for weight loss, calories count, but quality matters," insists Passerello. Skip the

calculator, and focus on eating nutrient-rich foods (vegetables, fruits, lean protein and whole grains) while getting rid of empty calories. And instead of playing the numbers game (i.e., counting calories and carbs), try to be more mindful of your hunger and fullness levels. On a scale of one to 10 (one being ravenous, 10 meaning you-need-to-change-your-pants stuffed), "try to stay between a three and a seven for most meals," says Passerello.

DIET SABOTEUR #2: YOU EAT THE SAME FOODS OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

We know that having too many options at mealtime can lead to overeating (hello, Sunday brunch buffet!). But on the flip side, it's not smart to limit variety too radically. Some dieters, in the hopes of avoiding temptation, reduce their food intake to just a few "safe" items—say grilled chicken and salad—

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SALAD PHOTO BY BIGSTOCK

When Healthy Isn't the Same as "Diet Friendly"

MANY OF THE MYTHS SURROUNDING "HEALTHY" FOODS HAVE BEEN DEBUNKED: We now know that low-fat is not necessarily waist-friendly, and that gluten-free products often contain more calories than the foods they replace. But it's still tempting to convince ourselves that a midafternoon granola bar or post-dinner fro-yo is actually diet compliant. "Many of the so-called health foods are actually anything but," says Frank Lipman, MD, founder of Eleven Eleven Wellness Center in New York. "Even those who are knowledgeable about nutrition can be fooled by hard-to-decipher labels, slick marketing campaigns or mom's out-of-date advice leftover from childhood."

Dr. Lipman has a long list of so-called healthy foods that can actually hurt your health. Some of the worst offenders on his hit list:

ENERGY BARS

Many of these "candy bars in fancier wrappers" cause blood sugar spikes—and deliver little nutritional value. "Convenient as they may be, they're crummy substitutes for real food," says Dr. Lipman. "Even the high-end bars tend to be heavily processed sugar-bombs with hardly enough protein or fiber to make them worth eating."

DIET SODAS

They're flavored with anything-but-natural sweeteners, which have been shown to have an appetite-triggering effect—so you're likely to eat more, not less! According to a 2009 study from the University of Minnesota, just one diet soda a day was associated with a 36 percent increased risk of metabolic syndrome and diabetes. Other studies have established a link between diet cola consumption and bone density loss.

FROZEN YOGURT AND SMOOTHIES

Many frozen yogurt treats are chock-full of chemical additives and sugar, and smoothies can quickly become sugar blasts as well when made with juices, simple syrup, ice cream and bananas, notes Dr. Lipman. Instead, ask for a simple shake made only with unsweetened almond milk or water, ice, fruit and powdered greens or protein.

For a truly healthy sweet fix, indulge in a bit of dark chocolate, frozen berries or plain Greek yogurt. If it's crunch you crave, munch on raw veggies, apple slices, kale chips, dried seaweed or a handful of nuts. A 2010 study at UCLA found that people who snacked on pistachios instead of pretzels lost more weight and experienced bigger drops in triglycerides and cholesterol levels—even though the pretzels contained fewer calories.



which they repeat over and over again. Besides making for dull mealtimes, extreme restricting can actually backfire.

That's because consuming the same thing every day, even if it's an organic, non-GMO, all-natural "superfood," can put you at risk for not getting the complete nutrition our bodies need. And that can lead to cravings strong enough to derail even the steeliest willpower. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans advise eating a variety of nutrient-packed foods, incorporating elements of the five food groups (vegetables, fruits, dairy, whole grains and protein) at every meal. By satisfying your body—and taste buds—chances are you'll be better equipped to resist that 1,200-calorie bacon cheeseburger calling your name at lunch.

An easy way to make sure you're getting the proper nutrients is to "eat the rainbow"—meaning filling your plate with a spectrum of colors. Dark greens like spinach and kale pack a ton of folate, calcium, iron and vitamin K. Orange and yellow foods (peppers, pumpkin, squash) contain high levels of vitamin C and important antioxidants. Red tomatoes have lycopene, a cancer-preventative micronutrient.

"There is a reason why nature supplies such a variety of foods," notes Dr. Teitelbaum, creator of the phone app Cures A-Z. "It is because this is what our body needs."

BOTTOM LINE: "When dieting, the trick is to get a wide variety of whole, nutrient-rich foods, while cutting out the sugar and white flour," he adds.

DIET SABOTEUR #3: YOU'RE EATING TOO MUCH OF ONE NUTRIENT.

Beyond varying your food groups, it's also essential that the three macronutrients—fat, protein and carbohydrates—are balanced. Of course, we all know the evils of too many carbs (especially the refined kind): the insulin spikes, the inflammation,

the lethargy. But overdoing protein can cause dehydration, and according to research from the National Institutes of Health, may eventually stress the kidneys as they work overtime to rid the body of the extra nitrogen protein it generates. As for fat, yes, it's back in favor and touted for its ability to help your body absorb nutrients, boost energy and promote satiety. But butter and bacon lovers beware: Eating too much saturated fat can raise your level of LDL (bad) cholesterol and increase your risk for heart disease.

What's the right ratio? According to guidelines from the Institutes of Medicine, carbohydrates should make up 45 to 65 percent of our daily calories (that means vegetables, fruits and grains—not chips, crackers and cake); protein should run between 10 and 35 percent; and fat 20 to 35 percent (with limited saturated and trans fats).

BOTTOM LINE: Improving balance isn't just for Pilates class. Your macronutrients may need an adjustment, too.

DIET SABOTEUR #4: YOU RELY TOO MUCH ON SUPPLEMENTS INSTEAD OF WHOLE-FOOD SOURCES.

In this fast-changing world of functional food and nutraceuticals, it's tempting to think popping vitamins and supplements can replace bad eating habits. Not a great idea. While multivitamins and supplements are helpful when you have a medically diagnosed deficiency, we need whole foods for caloric energy, for psychological and physical satisfaction and—most importantly—for micronutrients, aka the trace elements we may

not even know we're getting from food on a daily basis. "Although supplements contain the vitamins, minerals and amino acids that are most critical, there are a number of co-nutrients that can also

be very helpful, which are only found in food," notes Dr. Teitelbaum. Moreover, in 2005 researchers at Tufts University found "little justification for the general and widespread use of dietary supplements," concluding instead that "optimal health outcomes relate to dietary patterns, not nutrient supplements."

BOTTOM LINE: If you have a particular deficiency in something, take your supplements. Otherwise, natural, whole foods deliver far more beneficial goodness.

DIET SABOTEUR #5: YOU'RE EATING OUT AT "HEALTHY" RESTAURANTS TOO OFTEN.

People who regularly cook at home rather than eating in restaurants have been found to consume fewer calories and carbs, not to mention lower amounts of fat and sugar. But are the new "healthy" eateries, farm-to-table restaurants and chains that let you create your own organic salads, such as Sweetgreen, Panera, Dig Inn and Native Foods Café, as good as cooking at home?

Usually not. Even at a healthy restaurant, oversized portions are always a risk, and you can unknowingly end up eating a day's worth of calories at one sitting (though the growing trend of listing calories, fat and other nutritional information is a breakthrough in the right direction). What's more, there are reasons restaurant food tastes good—and they're called salt, butter and starches.

CHOCOLATE: BELL PEPPER AND PILLS PHOTOS BY BIGSTOCK

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Other common pitfalls of “healthy” restaurants?

- What many tout as “whole-wheat bread” is actually made primarily from bleached flour.
- Quinoa is nourishing and better for blood sugar than rice, but it’s still highly caloric at 222 calories per cooked cup.
- Sodium counts can escalate if you don’t pay attention—especially in “lean” sandwich meats.
- “Cold-pressed juice” sounds healthier than grocery-store OJ, but it can still run 60 grams of sugar per glass. Smoothies are also often sugar bombs lacking protein and healthy fat.
- Sweet potato fries have been drenched in oil, and have little of the virtue of the baked or roasted variety.

BOTTOM LINE: “Always be mindful of what you are selecting and how it is prepared if you are trying to manage your weight,” advises Passerello. Eat unadulterated veggies guilt-free, but give the side-eye to huge portions, any dish that’s drowning in dressing or sauce, fattening add-ons and fried anything.

DIET SABOTEUR #6: YOU’RE RESTRICTING FOOD INTAKE TOO MUCH THROUGHOUT THE WEEK, THEN BINGEING ON WEEKENDS.

It’s one thing to have a cheat meal—after all, you’ve been on point all week, and now you deserve a little reward! While weight-loss coaches generally approve of cheat meals as a way to stave off cravings and bump up metabolism, there’s always a danger that a little taste will trigger a days-long spiral. And a cheat day or a cheat weekend are another thing entirely.

BOTTOM LINE: To avoid going totally off the rails, plan ahead for your cheat meal by cutting a few extra calories ahead of time. Then when it’s time to cheat, focus on one indulgence, whether it’s cocktails, dessert or fettuccine Alfredo—not everything on the menu. **PS**

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HER CURRENT PRACTICE:

I do it by myself once or twice a week. I also trained to be a Nordic walking instructor in 2012, so now I also teach a Nordic walking course in which I combine HIIT; in between walking intervals, we do strength-training exercise such as burpees, jumping jacks, lunges and exercises with resistance bands for five minutes.

HOW PILATES ENHANCES NORDIC WALKING:

Pilates taught me to break down movements into their individual parts and to analyze them, which helps me focus on the correct Nordic walking technique and get the most benefit from the workout. The coordination I learned from Pilates is the perfect prerequisite for Nordic walking.

HOW NORDIC WALKING COMPLEMENTS HER PILATES:

It enhances your cardio endurance, which helps you practice Pilates over a longer period of time. Tae kwon do and Pilates are mostly done indoors,

so Nordic walking is a great opportunity to walk through the nearby woods and meadows and enjoy nature and the scenery.

ADVICE FOR PILATES PRACTITIONERS WHO WANT TO TRY NORDIC WALKING:

It’s a great activity whether you want to improve your fitness or just want to go out and enjoy nature. It’s for all ages and fitness levels. Just make sure that you use poles that are the correct length for you: If they’re too long, you’ll be lifting your shoulders all the time, causing tension. The angle between the upper arm and forearm should be a maximum of 90 degrees. The best way to find the correct length is to put the pole in front of you; the loop of the handle should be at the same level as your navel. **PS**

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I believe in, and strive to create, a balance of corrective, progressive, athletic and routine aspects for each lesson, and certainly for each client’s overall program and Pilates experience, to keep the mind and body progressing.

PS Do you adjust your cueing depending on the client?

LORI Absolutely! I enjoy the platform that Pilates provides for me to be a healer, scientist, artist, problem solver, guide, coach and clown. It’s all good—and it works.

Sometimes, I use science, from my PT knowledge. I’ll cue positioning, like “move your pubic bone toward your right lesser trochanter.” Or I’ll use my hands to invite co-contraction by cueing “keep pressure on my hands while you press the carriage out,” during the Footwork. Watch Joe in the archival footage—I’m sure this is what he’s doing.

I want Pilates instructors to know how much I value our work. Pilates instructors’ skills are not less valuable than a physical therapist’s. They are just different bodies of work. I find that I enjoy Pilates as my vocation, and physical therapy is a subset of that.

PS Is the language of anatomy useful for everyone?

LORI No. The most useful language is the one that works! Sometimes people think they can improve their movement and bodies by increasing their anatomical knowledge. And knowledge

is great, for sure. But it can also lead to a situation where the person knows what to do, therefore feels that they have done it. They can get ahead of themselves and move onto the next thing when the knowledge hasn’t integrated into the mind/body connection yet. I strive to connect people with themselves to develop their own felt sense, because at the end of the day, they are the ones in there.

A good example of this was a client of mine who was a doctor and who knew all the anatomy but had zero body awareness. Even though she joked, “I’m just a head in a jar,” I had high expectations that someone with the “brain” knowledge of the body could bring it into their workouts. But you can’t just think yourself into a new way of being. I stuck to the exercises, the usual suspects: Footwork, Hundred, Short Spine... Just when I thought she wasn’t going to get there, she did a beautiful Roll-Up!

Sometimes a cue like, “be a prancing pony,” which works with all of the strong men, or a quick touch with a “zshush zshush,” is more effective. Not all movement and sensation has to be named or understood by the logical brain. I think my next workshop will be called “Anatomically Correct Gibberish.” Stay tuned for this one! **PS**