Slow but sure way to lose

The rapid weight loss of contestants in reality TV shows may be inspiring, but it's not realistic or even healthy, says EMMA SPILETT. It's much better to take it slowly.

TV weight-loss programs have come under fire because of the weight-loss regime should be a sprint rather than a marathon.

However, health experts oppose fast solutions to weight loss and instead, advocate shedding kilos sustainably to allow healthy eating and exercise habits to develop for life.

Wollongong dietician Kelly Lambert advises clients to adhere to the “three Ps” of weight loss.

“It’s about portion size, finding the correct proportion of food and physical activity,” she says. “If people combine these things, they can’t fail.”

Rekreate Fitness personal trainer Kylie Reh believes long-term weight loss is a product of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

“The only reason weight comes back on is that people quickly and easily fall back into the old destructive habits that put the weight on in the first place,” she says.

Lambert agrees and has mixed views about the success of the shows.

“I think it can be inspiring and send a strong message that weight loss is achievable (but the reality is) that for the average working person with three types of show,” she says.

The Biggest Loser has glorified good health but failed to acknowledge the dangers associated with rapid weight loss.

“People have no idea how much goes on behind the scenes in these types of shows,” she says.

“Contestants are doing intense workouts and have their own dietitian on hand to help them out.”

“If someone came into my clinic having lost that amount of weight in such a short time, I would be concerned. It is possible to get results but it takes a hell of a lot of work over a long period of time.”

Reh agrees and has mixed views about the success of the show.

“I don’t change a person’s eating habits for good and that needs to happen for them to lose the weight for a long period,” she says.

“Many diet regimes aim to put the body into starvation mode, which can contribute to long-term health problems.”

Lambert is leading the call for weight-loss products to return to a “prescription only” status to ensure they are used correctly.

“Not all products are nutritionally complete so you can’t live on them alone,” she says.

“They cause a breakdown in fat but they can also lead to a breakdown in muscle so if you have a pre-disposition to things like diabetes or kidney disease, it can lead to low blood sugar and cause serious health issues.”

Health experts are also concerned weight-loss programs limiting food intake fail to address underlying attitudes to food that are responsible for weight gain, distorted body image and obesity-related health problems.

“The (programs) are relatively easy but it’s not a long-term solution,” Lambert says. “It doesn’t change a person’s eating habits for good and that needs to happen for them to lose the weight for a long period.”

Reh says people love to blame “hormones, genetics… I’ve heard them all” without taking responsibility for their own weight gain.

Shifting from “diet” to “lifestyle change” is critical for people looking to lose weight for life.

“Sometimes it’s just about incorporating knowledge and a change in thinking about food and the body,” Lambert says. “If people are sad or depressed or need a good starting point to set them on the right track.”

For people aiming to lose weight and keep it off, Lambert recommends losing just half a kilo per week.

“People might get disillusioned because it’s not a lot but it’s the safe way to do it,” she says. “If you cut your calories significantly you’re likely to be quite hungry and go off the rails.”

Losing half a kilo a week can happen by making a few small changes to your diet.

Wollongong dietician Kelly Lambert says portion control, proportion and physical activity are the keys to weight loss. Picture ORLANDO CHOOO

Lambert’s sustainable weight loss tips

1. Watch portion sizes

   • 1 serve of nuts = golf ball
   • 1 serve of cheese = matchbox
   • 1 serve of meat = pack of cards
   • 1 muffin = size of small egg
   • 1 serve of meals on a smaller plate.

2. Watch meal proportion

   The average plate should contain:
   • Half salad/vegetables
   • Quarter high-carbohydrate e.g. potatoes/bread/pasta/legumes
   • Quarter protein e.g. chicken, fish, red meat.

3. Physical activity

   • Look at your pace: you should be aiming to do 3000 steps in half an hour. Invest in a pedometer for accurate calculation.

4. Read labels properly

   • Look at kilojoules and fat content.
   • Watch for excess salt and sugar products.
   • Don’t be afraid of feeling hungry
   • Seek advice if you’re unsure about your diet, see a dietitian for advice. There are many misconceptions about what people should be eating.
   • 7. Don’t mistake hunger for thirst
   • Fluid intake is important - drink plenty of water and limited tea, coffee, diet soft drink and cordial.

Reh’s tips for success

1. Be consistent with healthy eating and training.
2. Be committed to yourself and your goals.
3. Make exercise and healthy eating a part of your daily lifestyle – it’s not a short-term thing.
4. Learn to love and accept yourself for who you are before you change the things you are unhappy with.
5. Drink water (two litres a day) and use multivitamins. (This helps to reduce fatigue as your energy system adjusts to your change in diet.)

Physical therapy with KERRY O’REILLY

Studies have shown a high correlation between depression and chronic back pain.

If you’re feeling the precursor or result of chronic pain and it can lead to poor surgical results.

Evidence suggests exercise can help alleviate depression and chronic back pain. Research suggests physical activity may be beneficial, if properly prescribed.

Kerry is a musculoskeletal physical therapist with 20 years of clinical experience. Visit www.shelharbourhealth.com.au