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# Slim and sleek

Women's World

By DR NOR ASHIKIN MOKHTAR

## Every woman's guide to weight loss.

EVERY woman – no matter how skinny or rational she may be – will have this thought at least once in her life: “I need to lose weight.”



A healthy diet, combined with regular exercise and a positive attitude, is guaranteed to help you lose weight.

Weight loss companies, slimming centres and diet food manufacturers recognise this female weakness and very often, we fall for their tactics! While some of these products and services may work, there is no guarantee of their safety or long-term efficacy.

However, there is a guarantee with one method of weight loss: a healthy diet, combined with regular exercise and a positive attitude. There is scientific evidence to back this up, as well as personal testimonies from people who have succeeded in losing weight with these healthy methods.

It won't be easy, and it won't be quick. But it will be worth it.

### First: Make a commitment

Just like with any other goal that you want to achieve, weight loss is something that you have to commit yourself towards wholeheartedly. Firstly, think about why you want to lose weight. It should be for yourself and your own benefit, not for someone else.

Don't lose weight just because your boyfriend or husband says you should; lose weight because you want to feel good about yourself.

Then ask yourself whether you are ready to make permanent changes to your lifestyle. This may require some drastic changes to your eating routine, daily activities and other habits that you have become accustomed to – and not just for a week or a month, but for the rest of your life. Don't force yourself if there are other factors in your life that pose challenges at this point, such as marital, financial or work problems.

If you are confident with these two questions, then you are committed to your goal.

### Second: Get emotional support

Yes, I mentioned earlier that you should not bow to external pressure to lose weight. But you do need external support to help you achieve your goals.

Support can come from your partner, family, friends and colleagues. They must understand why you are doing this and have your best interests at heart. They can offer support by eating healthily and exercising with you, listening to your concerns, and not forcing you to do things that you don't want to.

If they ridicule you or show little confidence in you, explain to them that their behaviour only hinders you from your objective.

### Third: Set a realistic goal

Want to lose 20kg in two weeks? That's just not possible, and you should not try to aim for that. Be realistic in your expectations, or else you will just disappoint yourself.

A reasonable rate of weight loss is 500g to 1kg a week, which you can achieve by burning between 500 and 1,000 calories every day. You don't have to starve yourself to burn these calories – combine a lower calorie intake with exercise every day.

Also, it will help to set small "process goals" rather than daunting "outcome goals". For example, a goal like "exercising for 15 minutes a day" is easier to achieve than "lose 20 kg".

Then you can increase your goals gradually, for example, going up to 30 minutes of exercise a day.

#### Four: Eat healthily and enjoy it

Why does healthy eating have to mean bland, boring meals? If you want to lose weight healthily and keep it off, then you have to adopt eating habits that still allow you to enjoy the pleasure of food, or else you will not be motivated to continue eating healthily.

The recommended calorie intake for Malaysian women is 2,000kcal per day, and for men is 2,500kcal per day. As I mentioned earlier, you should aim to reduce your daily calorie intake by 500-1,000kcal per day. Do not go down to a very-low-calorie diet, as this could be dangerous for you.

The no. 1 rule to reducing calories is to reduce your fat intake. Cut down on fried and oily foods, and trim off the skin and fat in your meats. Eating more plant-based foods – fruits, vegetables and wholegrains – will also help you lower calorie intake.

Eat a variety of foods so that you do not get bored. Varying your cooking styles will also make meals interesting from day to day.

The best advice I can give is to get advice from a professional! This means consulting your family physician or asking him to refer you to a dietitian.

#### Five: Be active

Cutting down on calories from your daily diet is one method – but you can “top up” that strategy by exercising regularly, so that you do not have to diet so much. Exercising for 30 minutes a day, four days a week, can help you double your rate of weight loss!

Exercising doesn't have to use up a lot of money or time. How about a brisk walk or jog around the neighbourhood, 15 minutes in the morning and another 15 minutes in the evening? Small daily things can also increase your physical activity level, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Of course, if you enjoy group activities or sports, you can fit in some gym classes, badminton or swimming in the weekends.

The best thing about exercise is that it offers many bonus benefits beyond weight loss. It improves your health in the long term and makes you feel good about yourself!

## Six: Change your life

Yes, you have already begun changing your lifestyle, such as your eating habits and your physical activity routine. But a successful weight loss strategy means changing your life and your mindset too.

You should view this as the dawning of a new day. Old challenges must be acknowledged and dealt with positively, so that you know how to cope with them if they arise again in the future.

If you experience a setback, do not give up. Think about why the setback occurred and start afresh the next day. And do not just look towards tomorrow; look towards the rest of your life.

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