



Cooperative Extension Service

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Ditch that weight-loss plan!

How are those New Year's Resolutions coming along? If my sources are correct, many of you made resolutions that involve losing weight, exercise, and better eating habits. Unfortunately many of these changes will not last long, and research shows that very few will realize (and maintain) their weight loss goals. Sound familiar? What can we do to stop this cycle of failed weight loss plans?

Here's my idea: stop trying to lose weight!!

If you are now thinking I'm a little bit crazy, at least I can take comfort in the fact that I'm not the only one. Many health professionals are recognizing that weight is just one determinant of overall health, and typical weight-loss routines are incredibly unsuccessful.

In fact, an article I recently read in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association highlighted the benefits of a *size acceptance intervention* designed to embrace the idea that health is related to many behaviors *independent* of body weight. This so-called 'Health-At-Every-Size' (HAES) approach demonstrated beneficial effects on multiple eating behaviors as well as body weight management. It seems that many of the participants benefitted from the positive focus on healthier lifestyles.

Now this is not to say that body weight is irrelevant. Being overweight and obese is unquestionably linked to a greater risk for certain chronic conditions. However, a growing body of evidence is demonstrating that our focus on weight may, in fact, be unhealthy—and more positive approaches produce better results for many individuals.

How can you get started?

1. **Toss that scale**, and make your health a priority. Positive lifestyle choices will often lead to a healthy body weight.
2. **Set a goal** and write it down! Make sure your goal is S.M.A.R.T. (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, **T**ime-bound).
3. **Have a plan** (and follow it ☺). Major lifestyle changes don't happen by accident, and they don't happen overnight. Know what challenges you will face and take small steps to overcome these challenges.

As we kick off 2011 please beware of quick weight-loss plans or severely restrictive diets. While they may show results in the short-term, these are often not healthy habits and are certainly not sustainable. More positive efforts towards wholesome food and activity choices that you enjoy will be the ones that stand the test of time. To view *The ABCs of Health-Focused Well-Being*, a great UW Extension publication on this very topic, please visit <http://www.wyomingextension.org/agpubs/pubs/MP112-4.pdf>. For further handouts and information feel free to visit www.uwyo.edu/winwyoming, the home page for the Wellness IN Wyoming project. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University of Wyoming Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Northeast Wyoming. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*