

Lightening Your Load



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If you're an aging adult like me and the new year finds you feeling fatter than ever, January may be a time for new resolve and general belt tightening. Do you have serial dates with Weight Watchers, comb the diet racks at the bookstore, and avoid full-length mirrors? Cease and desist. To lose weight, try this simple, commonsense method instead.

Diets are not an effective way to shed pounds. When you starve yourself, you may lose weight temporarily, but when you quit, research shows that you will gain back what you lost and add more. The problem is that your body is constantly seeking to return to its accustomed weight, or set point.

The long-term solution uses set point theory to lower your body's accustomed weight.

The idea is that your adult body will resist lowering your weight unless you change your lifestyle. Whether you eat more food, or eat less, your body will readjust to maintain the set point. But if you exercise more and regularly, your body will be forced to change its ways.

Follow this simple formula to learn how. First take the number 220 and subtract your age. Take me, age 58, for example.

$$\begin{array}{r} 220 \\ -58 \\ \hline 162 \end{array}$$

The number 162 represents my estimated maximum heart rate (EMHR). Now create a target range by multiplying the EMHR first by 0.65 and then by 0.85:

$$\begin{array}{l} 0.65 \times 162 = 105 \\ 0.85 \times 162 = 138 \end{array}$$

These numbers represent outer limits, low and high. My target heart rate thus falls in the 105-138 range. To apply set point theory and lose weight, I will need to exercise so that my heart rate falls in this target range for half an hour at least three times per week.

If you follow this formula, bear in mind that you will see an adjustment period of about six or eight weeks during which no weight loss will occur. Thereafter, providing that your diet is appropriate—the right types of food in the right quantities—you will lose weight at the rate of about two pounds per month. When I started exercising on January 15, 2006, I lost nine pounds by the end of June.

Granted, this method of weight loss is not a quick fix. But it is supremely safe, it is lasting, and—best of all!—it creates a fitter you with a stronger heart as well as a slimmer body.

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