

Three Phase Nutritional Planning

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Last week I addressed the three phases of weight loss with an emphasis on exercise. This week I will elaborate on the nutritional portion of that program.

Nutrition Phase I has two goals, create awareness and expand your knowledge. Keeping a food log is THE best way to do this. By doing so you will develop the *skills* needed to make informed choices. Perhaps more importantly, it creates accountability and a record from which to see areas for improvement.

First, you need to become aware of your current eating habits.

- How many calories do you consume on a regular basis?
- Do you regularly exclude certain food groups?
- Do you eat an unequal balance of processed or convenience foods?
- Do you frequently over-indulge in high calorie foods?
- Do you have emotional triggers that cause you to crave eating to soothe those feelings?
 - Are there times of day that seem to be more difficult for you to make good choices?
 - Do you balance your carbohydrates with protein?

Second, you need to learn more information about healthy eating.

- How many calories do you need to consume to maintain your current weight?
- How many calories do you need to consume to lose one to two pounds per week?
- How many portions of each food group make up your healthy calorie range?
- What is an actual portion of each food group?
- What are the basic exchanges (equal calories per serving) for each food group?
- What is the specific calorie breakdown for each basic food group serving?
- What can you do to make better choices when balancing your food options?
- What would constitute a balanced meal choice based on your calorie and nutritional needs?

Phase II Nutrition takes all the information you have learned and shapes it into a useful food plan. Starting from your current average calorie intake, begin to decrease that by 10% weekly. A rapid decrease is extremely difficult to maintain and it often leads to over-indulgence due to the unnatural over-restriction. This can be self-defeating in the long run. Your body perceives a dramatic decrease in calories as a possible famine and this causes the release of fat-storage hormones. Gradual decrease is effective because the body is designed for this kind of self-preservation. To achieve lasting weight loss you need to work with this survival principal.

Phase II Nutrition is a time of disciplined eating. You must be aware of what you are eating, in what quantity and with what other foods. Planning is a vital part of this. You need to plan your meals to ensure that you balance your nutritional intake. If you do not plan ahead, it is difficult to get all the needed servings of nutritional food. Often impulse choices and convenience foods take the place of more healthy ones. This happens due to a failure to plan. Just keeping the information in your head or hit and miss logging, will not give you the results you desire. A commitment to food logging and an accountability partner are solid steps toward reaching your goals. Continue to decrease your calories weekly until you reach your goal or hit 1200 calories. Do not go lower unless being medically supervised.

There is a rule to consider when lowering calories. After 72 hours your body begins to sense the chance of famine and will begin to actively store fat. At this point you will need to increase your calories by 200-400 in order to halt the secretion of fat storage hormones. After three to four days you can decrease back to your goal-calorie range. By following this three-day plan you can work with your body chemistry instead of against it. You can safely achieve your goal without deprivation or hormonal upsets. It is recommended that you develop a few sample menus based on your personal choices to establish several go-to meals. Pick foods that you eat often and have on

hand. Be sure to balance the meal to meet your nutritional needs and perhaps even pair it with your other daily choices to make entire nutritionally balanced days. When you meet your goal, you are ready for Phase III.

Phase III Nutrition is maintenance.

Once you reach your goal weight it is not necessary to log each meal. By this time you have a solid grasp of healthy eating and have developed good meal planning skills. Now establish the calories needed to maintain your current weight and stick to that range. Your weight will fluctuate, as is common in life. Holidays and special events often bring about a rise in weight. It is recommended that you weigh weekly and when you reach five pounds above your goal weight that you begin to use your phase II skills to bring you back to your goal. At this time weight should not be your focus, but you will need to monitor it to keep it from creeping back. Chances are if you have struggled with weight, you will always need to keep track of it. Once you stop paying attention, old habits are likely to return. Keeping your weight issue “on the radar” but not as your focus is a part of your lifetime-wellness lifestyle