

The Block Center
1750 Norwood Drive
Hurst Texas, 76054 (Dallas area)
817-280-9933
www.blockcenter.com

Easy, Effective & Healthy Weight Loss
By Dr. Mary Ann Block

Why You Can't Lose Weight or Keep It Off

For years we have all heard "a calorie is a calorie" and "calories in-calories out" (CI-CO). If we reduce the number of calories we eat and increase the number of calories we burn, we will lose weight. Today that concept may be obsolete. New studies indicate the CI-CO concept may have not been true at all. The theory made such perfect sense, the public had no problem grabbing it and making it our own. Why wouldn't CI-CO be correct? It looks like there is a reason....Metabolism.

We all have different metabolisms. Some of us can sit around all day, eat ice cream and cookies and never gain an ounce while others can exercise 2 hours per day, eat only 1000 calories and still gain weight. I guess we should have thought about this when applying the CI-CO concept. Obviously it was wrong.

If you are one who belongs to the latter group, it probably appears that nothing you do will allow you to lose weight. And if you do lose it, it doesn't stay off. You just put the weight right back on and often gain even more the next time around. That's because you have a slow metabolism. I know, you have been telling everyone that for years. You knew it all along. No one would believe you. Others accused you of hiding your food, not being honest about how much you were eating. After all, if you were really not eating much, how could you possibly gain weight? After all CI-CO!

It turns out it just isn't that simple. Sure, there are certainly individuals who do not tell the truth about what they eat. There are others that are unaware of what they are eating and how many calories those foods contain. But not everyone fits that profile.

Decreasing calorie count will make the body think it is starving. The body cannot tell the difference between dieting and starvation so your body will slow metabolism even further, making it more and more difficult to lose weight. It is truly a vicious cycle. So dieting may actually cause you to gain weight.

In order to effectively lose weight you must have a working metabolism. To determine if you have an effective metabolism, there are certain blood tests that must be performed. Most overweight individuals have not had these tests done.

Thyroid Problems

A sluggish thyroid is the number one reason people cannot lose weight. You have probably had a thyroid test done and your doctor told you your thyroid is fine. However, it might surprise you to know that your doctor may not have performed an adequate thyroid test.

Most doctors do a thyroid test called TSH, or Thyroid Stimulating Hormone test. If TSH is high, your thyroid is under active (Hypothyroid). If your TSH is low, it means you have an overactive thyroid (Hyperthyroid). With an overactive thyroid you may actually have trouble gaining weight and you will have plenty of energy. Now, who complains about that? But if your thyroid is under active, you will not be able to lose weight consistently, no matter how hard you try and no matter how much you exercise and restrict calories. You will also usually be tired. Here is a partial list of Hypothyroid symptoms:

Weight Gain	Fatigue
Depression	Weakness
Cold intolerance	Constipation
Dry, thin hair	Hair loss
Dry skin	Joint and muscle pain
Insomnia	Abnormal menstrual cycle

So the first clue that you may have an under active thyroid is that you really do exercise and do keep your calories low and you still can't lose weight. However, your doctor may have tested your TSH and found the number to fall in the normal range. That doesn't mean your thyroid is functioning as it should.

You see, TSH is a measurement for T4. T4 is one of the thyroid chemicals in the body. But T4 is not the active form of thyroid. That would be T3. T4 must convert to T3 for the body to actually use the thyroid hormone that is made. So measuring TSH only tells us about T4, not about T3 or how well the thyroid is working or if the person has a good, working metabolism.

There was a time when measuring T3 was not possible. Then we had to use TSH and T4 measurements to guess if the thyroid was working. That is no longer the case, yet I find that most doctors in the United States still use the old method for evaluating the thyroid.

TSH can be used as a measurement, but if it is normal, Total T3 and Free T3 should then be measured.

If Total T3 and Free T3 are normal there are further steps to take. Thyroid lab values are famous for not being very accurate. Just a few years ago the “normal” values for TSH were between 0.5 and 5.5. The endocrinologists decided those numbers weren’t getting the job done so they changed the numbers of “normal” to 0.3-3.3 for TSH. Now if you had a TSH of 4.2, a few years ago you were told that you were perfectly normal. Then all of a sudden, with the change of normal values, you were instantly Hypothyroid. I wonder how many people were told they were normal and never checked back after the numbers changed so they never found out they were not normal.

In medical school training, I was taught to treat the patient, not the lab value. Lab values can be beneficial, or course. But when the symptoms say one thing and the lab says another, I am going to treat the symptoms, not the lab value. This is how I was taught to practice medicine in my medical school.

Undiagnosed Hypothyroidism is the most common cause of weight gain but there are other physical factors that can play a role as well.

Sugar/Carbohydrates

Many of the weight loss plans allow you to use artificial sweeteners as part of the program. I have heard commercials for a diet menu in which the woman says, “On this diet, I can eat chocolate cake.”

I have a real problem with the concept of eating artificial sweeteners when you are trying to lose weight and keep it off. Many of you won’t like hearing this part of my plan, but artificial sweeteners are out! Studies using aspartame, Equal® and Nutrisweet®, have shown very clearly that using artificial sweeteners causes weight gain. It seems that artificial sweeteners trick the brain into thinking you are eating sugar so the body responds in the same manner it would if you were eating sugar...with weight gain.

Sugar is a very addictive food also. I think our food manufacturers know this already. That is probably why they put sugar into so many of the packaged foods. Since we are addicted to sugar we are more likely to buy a particular food or brand of food if it contains sugar.

Sugar triggers hunger. Actually, carbohydrates (carbohydrates) trigger hunger, especially the more refined ones, like white bread, white rice and pasta. Everything we eat eventually turns into sugar. That is how our bodies work. The sugar then feeds our brain and other organs. The white bread, white rice and pasta are turned into sugar very quickly. We have enzymes in our mouth that start to break down the foods we are eating as soon as we start chewing. The process starts with that first bite and by the time the food is in your stomach, it is already sugar. You might as well have eaten a candy bar.

Now, I am not telling you to eat a candy bar but I am telling you to avoid those white flour foods that turn so quickly into sugar. Proteins and fats turn into sugar as well, but do so very slowly. That is why eating protein and fats satiates you and keeps you from feeling hungry longer. Understanding this concept is the most important part of this weight loss program.

Between the years 1970 and 2000, daily consumption of sweetened soft drinks increased 70%. JAMA, Oct. 28, 2009, Vol. 302, No. 16, pp. 1741-1742, which quoted a scientific paper by Rachel K. Johnson, PhD.

MPH. The American Heart Association released a statement saying that the Americans consume an average of 22.2 teaspoons of sugar daily which equals 355 calories. The article stated that soft drinks and other sweetened beverages are the primary source of these sugars. Observational studies suggest that this soft drink intake may be associated with greater body weight and lower intake of nutrients.

According to the same article in JAMA, the American Sugar Association and the American Beverage Association have criticized the statements made by the American Heart Association in regard to sugar. That doesn't surprise me.

Insulin Imbalance

Insulin lets the body utilize glucose and carbohydrates. Food allergies, eating habits and stress can interfere with glucose and carbohydrate utilization causing glucose intolerance. If insulin is not cleared from the blood stream after a meal it makes you feel hungry. The more carbohydrates you eat the more hungry you feel. Overweight people burn sugar less effectively than those with normal weight and dieting only makes it worse. The more weight you gain the worse the insulin problem becomes. Diabetes then can occur.

Excess insulin then causes salt and water retention, sleep disorders and interference with neurotransmitters, increased LDL cholesterol, interference with the thyroid hormone, thyroxine which then slows metabolism and more weight is gained.

You cannot have your cake and eat it too. If your goal is to find out why you gain weight or can't lose weight and keep it off, this plan is for you. It will take some major changes in your eating habits but if you make the changes as well as finding out the other medical problems that are interfering with your weight loss plan, you will lose weight and keep it off. At least you will lose weight and know how to keep it off.

Fat Free foods

Everyone is trying to avoid fat. Fat in food is not what makes you fat. It is the carbohydrates in foods. Of course, too much fat is not a good thing but our bodies need fat. Our bodies also need cholesterol. I have heard many doctors say that a person cannot have too low of a cholesterol reading. That is just not true. Cholesterol is the precursor to all of our sex hormones, like estrogen, testosterone, progesterone and DHEA. It also helps make our stress hormones in our adrenal gland. We need cholesterol. We must have cholesterol. Too low cholesterol is associated with an increase risk of cancer.

We also need cholesterol to prevent premature aging and dementia. Could the increase in cancer, Alzheimer's and other dementias be from the increased prescribing of cholesterol lowering drugs?

The "normal" lab value of cholesterol has been lowered by laboratories to be no more than 170 in a healthy adult. I wonder who is responsible for lowering it to this number. Could it be the pharmaceutical companies who make billions of dollars from selling these drugs? And how many more drugs can they sell to treat the many side effects caused by the cholesterol lowering drugs?

We Actually Live Longer with Higher Cholesterol

It just doesn't make sense to eat foods that are low in fat when you are trying to lose weight. Most foods that advertise that they are low in fat are actually high in carbohydrates. Do you know what carbohydrates turn into in the body when they are not used up with physical activity? Carbohydrates turn to fat!

Fat satiate us. They help make us feel full so we don't continue to eat even after a full meal. Fats are not usually the cause of weight gain. Because fats do such a good job of satiating us we don't keep eating fats like we do carbohydrates.

Carbohydrates make us feel hungrier. Because they turn into sugar so quickly, the food doesn't stay around to continue to make us feel full. Carbohydrates do not satiate us. They may satisfy us in the short term but we will not get long term satiation from eating carbohydrates. I have observed that if someone

eats only carbohydrates for breakfast, like cereal, pancakes or toast, they will usually feel hungry again in about one hour. If they add some protein to the carbohydrate, the hunger will be put off a little longer. However, if they eat only protein for breakfast, like eggs, bacon or sausage they will probably not be hungry the entire morning.

There are good fats called essential fatty acids. They are called “essential” because we need them for our bodies to function properly and because our bodies will not make these fats on their own. We must obtain them from our diet.

Fish oils or omega 3's along with omega 6 and omega 9 are all essential fatty acids. These fats help increase HDL (so called “good cholesterol”) and reduce LDL (so called “bad cholesterol”) and triglycerides.

Craving food

Food craving is another reason people cannot gain weight. Everyone is familiar with food cravings. You open the refrigerator door and don't see anything you “feel” like eating so you close the refrigerator and go to the pantry. You keep looking until you find that one thing that you are craving. Then you are happy for a while.

Casein/Gluten Peptides

Some people have difficulty metabolizing certain foods. Casein, or dairy products and gluten foods, anything containing wheat, rye, barley, oats or spelt, are two foods that typically cause this problem.

When a susceptible individual eats a casein or gluten food, instead of digesting it properly, it is broken down into small proteins called peptides that actually look like morphine and opium to the body and brain. If you are one of these people who do not metabolize these foods properly, you would tend to crave those foods containing casein and/or gluten. It could be that you are craving them because they feel like these addictive drugs to you even though you are not aware that is what is happening. You will want to eat them often. You will crave them and you will gain weight eating too much of them. There is a urine test to see if you are metabolizing casein or gluten improperly.

Allergies

Allergies can also cause you to crave foods. If you don't have a severe and life-threatening allergic reaction to a food, chances are you will crave it if you are allergic to it. It sounds contradictory to actually crave something you are allergic to, but I see it all the time. When I decide which foods to skin test on patients, I look at their diets. If they eat a food at least three times per week and tend to really like a specific food, those are the ones I will test. They will usually have a positive allergic skin reaction to the foods they love.

The allergy cells in the body are called Mast Cells. They contain histamine and other chemicals that are released when you have an allergic reaction. Some people will sneeze or cough from an allergy. Others will have a skin reaction, while others might have asthma. They are all allergic reactions. However, these Mast Cells are not just found in the nose, throat, lungs and on the skin. They are actually found every where in the body, including the stomach and the brain. This means that the allergic reaction can change how you think, act and feel. It can also make you hungry or crave foods.

Some food allergy reactions cause people to retain fluid. I had one patient who reported to me that she had gained 16 pounds over night after eating a small amount of wheat.

This published study supports that concept. When calories stayed the same, woman gained weight when allergic foods were eaten and lost when they were avoided. O'Banion Dr. et al Behavior Effects of Food Sensitivity. An Ecological and Nutritional Approach to Behavioral Medicine. 1982

I have found that if you gain three or more pounds in one day, the cause is usually from an allergic reaction to a food. It is not fat you are gaining but it is fluid. Avoidance of allergic foods is followed by diuresis, disappearance of edema, sudden decrease in weight, decreased appetite, and ability to follow a diet.

Randolph, T. *Masked food allergy as a factor in the development and persistence of obesity.* J Lab Clin Med 32:1547, 1947.

If you find that you do gain three or more pounds in one day, keep a food diary to see if you can figure out which food is causing it. The number one food I find in my practice that causes fluid retention is gluten foods. These are anything made from wheat (including white flour and pasta), oats, barley, rye and spelt. You will be amazed at how fast you will lose that weight if it is just fluid retention. If you eliminate the offending food, the extra weight from the allergic food will be gone in one or two days. I think this is why people often lose a few pounds very quickly when first starting a diet.

Hormones

I have observed, through the years, that many normally slender women begin to gain weight around the time of menopause. These women have been thin their entire lives, yet practically over night, they balloon up and gain significant amounts of weight. I have always presumed it had something to do with hormones. I wondered why it happened to some women but certainly it did not happen to all women.

One might think that if you are gaining weight around the time of menopause that it is caused from decreased estrogen. However, women begin to lose progesterone long before estrogen. When they are gaining the weight, they are actually in an estrogen dominant state which is a term coined by John Lee, MD to mean too much estrogen for the amount of progesterone one has. Estrogen dominance, especially when compared to progesterone levels can cause weight gain. Low progesterone to estrogen ration is also associated with fluid retention and that causes excess weight. Estrogen also promotes fat storage.

Most women will tell you have they eaten more or craved more at a certain time in their menstrual cycle. This is not made up. It is a true reaction to a change in hormones. Those monthly hormone changes are also associated with weight gain and fluid retention.

Cortisol is a hormone too. Cortisol is called the “stress” hormone. It is released when you are under stress for long periods of time. Cortisol contributes to increased fat storage in the abdominal region. Relaxation techniques may be helpful. Magnesium also helps with relaxation. Another helpful tool is to stop your usual activities in the middle of the afternoon, around 2:00-3:00 PM, slowly drink a cup of hot tea and do something you enjoy like watch a TV program, read or do crossword puzzles. This activity has been shown to reduce stress hormone levels when done consistently.