

By : Dr Paul Bell



WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Ok, I am sure this isn't news to most people but just in case you didn't realise 'Crash diets tend not work'. Obviously some people have great success trying out the latest dietary fad but for the vast majority, when we crash diet it leads to discomfort, fatigue, unhappiness and usually very little, if any long term weight loss.

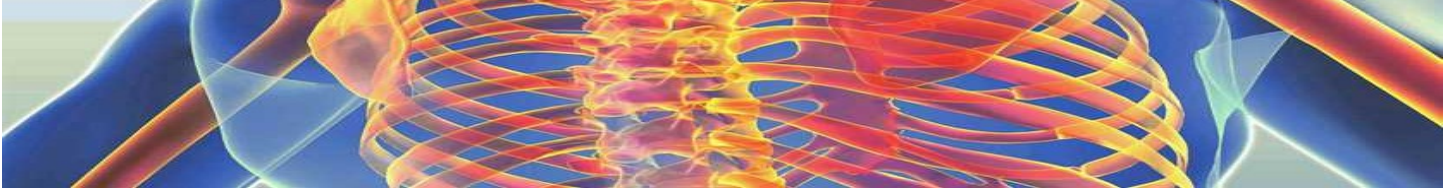
The body is an amazing piece of machinery and extremely capable of complex and prolonged adaptations. As I often say when lecturing on sports injuries, the biggest mistake we make is not giving the body sufficient time to adapt and this is exactly the same for weight management.

Relatively, the heavier we are (be it fat or muscle) the more calories we need to function, therefore our metabolism and subsequently appetite, adapt to this need for extra calories.

This is where sport can be extremely useful. By increasing our energy expenditure when exercising we burn more calories. Now I hear you say 'if we burn more calories then surely we need more food' and of course this is true. The aim is to balance energy/calorie expenditure so that the loss is slow and controlled allowing the body and metabolism to adapt.

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It is important to remember that when you commence exercise you will start to increase your muscle mass and your metabolism will increase; this will probably make you hungrier. The trick is not to overeat at this stage. As your body becomes accustomed to the new level of activity your metabolism will stabilise.

Another thing to be aware of is that as far as the scales are concerned you may not lose weight! The muscle mass you are developing is heavier than the fat, so it's always important to look at yourself in the mirror and visualise the improvements that will be taking place.

Aim for a slow progressive increase in exercise and sport, this allows adaptation and also reduces your risk of suffering from injury if you are new to exercise or returning to sport after a long break. Supplement this with a controlled eating approach, don't try to lower your calorific content much but perhaps eat healthier and try eating smaller portions more often, this enables your body to utilise the food more efficiently. Remember it is good practice to try and eat within the first 30-40 minutes after exercising, as during this time the body will absorb more efficiently and it will also aid recovery.

I am often asked which sports are most effective for weight loss? My honest belief is that you should do an activity you enjoy, if you really don't like running then why run! Anything that increases your energy expenditure, from walking to tennis to triathlon, is going to be beneficial. Obviously the longer the activity lasts and the more you participate the greater the benefit.

If you are planning on returning to sport, especially if the sport involves dynamic and power based movements, such as tennis or squash, I would advise doing some basic fitness work first, again this is just giving the body more opportunity to adapt and reduces your risk of injury.

It may be difficult to accept but there is a straight forward and extremely effective method of weight management that will work for us all: 'Eat slightly less calories than you expend progressively over a period of time and you will successfully manage your weight'.

**Crash diets tend
not to work!**

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