Lose the Weight, Keep the Energy

Many of us have been influenced by advertisements, the media, and our peers to think that lean is good and leaner is better. In this environment, it is important to reflect on our reasons for wanting to reduce our weight and what an appropriate weight goal should be.

What you must know to lose weight:
- **Diets don’t work** — dieting and denial slow the metabolism (making it harder to lose weight) and lead to overeating, if not binge eating.
- Your body has a **setpoint** — a predetermined weight range that is appropriate for your body; it may not be your favorite number, but you can’t healthfully change it.
- The body is a **calculator** — calories in must be calibrated with calories out.
- **One diet does not fit all** when it comes to losing weight and keeping strength.

It is essential to maintain enough energy to train and keep our power. Here is how you know you’ve got a healthy sports nutrition weight reduction eating plan:
- There are NO BAD FOODS. There should be room in the eating plan for carbohydrates, protein, and fat, and enough leeway so that 10-20% of your calories can come from whatever fun or indulgent foods you like. **Hey, life is short!**
- You don’t feel hungry all the time or obsessed with what you “can” and “can’t” have.
- You identify your personal “calorie budget” (see the handout “How Much Food Do I Need?”) and subtract about 20%. More restrictive eating really messes up your metabolism and may trigger eating disorders which can take years to recover from.
- An eating plan should **not** be confused with an opportunity to express control, rigidity, or self-denial.

Some time-tested **tips from sports nutritionists**:
- Divide your calorie budget across the day, instead of doing mostly night eating.
- **Eat slowly and mindfully** and pay attention to hunger and fullness signals.
- Eat some of your favorite foods regularly to avoid deprivation.
- The lowest calorie fluid replacement for athletes is **water**.
- **Sleep deprivation** makes weight loss significantly harder.

For help with a **personalized eating plan** at MIT:
- Contact your physician at MIT Medical and ask for a referral to see the MIT Medical nutritionist. You must have a doctor’s referral to see the nutritionist. Tell the nutritionist that you are interested in a sports nutrition food plan for weight reduction.
- Get tips on making healthy behavior changes and staying motivated, as well as information about eating and body image concerns, from the **Center for Health Promotion and Wellness** at MIT Medical: healthed@med.mit.edu

Adapted from Nancy Clark’s Sports Nutrition Guidebook
Questions about this topic? Contact Julie Banda at the Center for Health Promotion and Wellness banj@med.mit.edu 617/253-1318