

WHOLE-ISTIC WEIGHT LOSS: REVERSING OBESITY WITH WHOLE FOODS

» WRITTEN BY SHAWN RADCLIFFE

ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH FEBRUARY, OR MARCH IF

you're lucky, when you start to regret your latest New Year's Resolution elimination diet—the no-carb or no-fat or no-solid food for a week too long—Caroline Fornshell will be waiting for you on the other side of that nightmarish weight loss tunnel.

But don't expect her to come peddling another name-brand diet promising speedy weight loss earned with minimal effort. She has different plans in store for you, something a little more holistic than most fad diets. A better term would probably be “whole-istic,” because her approach to weight loss hinges on the healing power of whole foods, those easily identifiable, straight-from-the-garden foods that are absent from so many aisles of the modern supermarket.

If her way sounds like hard work, then you're starting to understand just how difficult it is to lose weight and keep it off, especially after spending so many years filling your body's nooks and crannies with pound after extra pound. But Fornshell is confident that you'll be receptive to what she's offering, mainly because you've tried everything else before.

“Most of the folks who come through my door are sick of failing,” says Fornshell, a registered dietician and founder of LWell, a comprehensive wellness and weight-loss program in Yorktown, Virginia. “They don't want to fail any more.”

Alternative to Weight Loss Hype

When it comes to quick weight loss, though, failure seems to be the norm. According to Marketdata Enterprises, Americans who try dieting make four to five attempts each year to lose weight. Often the problem isn't with losing weight in the beginning—“all elimination diets will cause you to lose weight at first,” says Fornshell—but with following through for the long-haul.

Still, people are lured in by the marketing claims that prop up the countless weight loss programs, diet books and celebrity diet plans.

it's about developing a skill—and that skill is cooking.”

Being able to cook will make the difference between following the path of new foods and flavors, and pulling over at the first fast food restaurant along the way. Success, though, begins even before you pick up your first spatula.

“It starts in the grocery store,” says Dannon. “If you’re filling half your shopping cart with fruits and vegetables, then the chances are when you get home you’re going to be able to fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables.”

Children and Whole Foods

Unfortunately, children are not immune to the obesity epidemic. In 2012, approximately 17 percent of children in the U.S. between the ages of two and 19 were obese. These children face the same health problems as adults who are obese, but they are also at an increased risk of bone and joint problems, sleep apnea and stigmatization and low self-esteem.

A whole foods diet can help children not only lose weight, but also develop skills that will carry them into a healthy adulthood. The School Health Initiative Program is taking this approach to improving the lives of children through nutrition education, healthy changes to school meals and cooking classes.

“The focus for the kids is really learning to think about their plate,” says Lazev, “to think about portion size, to think about the balance of the whole foods that they’re eating. And to think about recognizable foods, so they understand where it goes on the plate.”

This whole food journey, though, isn’t one that children take alone. Parents and other guardians are also along for the ride.

“It’s important that if we’re teaching the kids about healthy eating,” says Lazev, “that when they go home they’re having the opportunity to follow through with what they’ve learned.”

For the School Health Initiative Program, this includes parent-child cooking classes and grocery store tours to help parents choose and prepare healthy foods for their families. The program has already produced positive results—with students eating more fruits and vegetables each day. Real change for the school system, though, will be a slow and gradual process.

That is the heart of the whole foods approach—it’s a long-term lifestyle solution. Still, you can expect some real gains even before the weight starts to come off.

“Whole foods are as much a quick fix as anything that people purchase to help them with weight loss,” says Fornshell, “because they’ll feel much different and much better in a very short period of time.” ■

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WATER VS. SUGARY DRINKS

Water for Life

- Water makes up more than half of your body weight.
- You need to drink enough water to replace what's lost through sweating, breathing and urinating.
- With no added sugar or calories, water is the ideal hydration choice.
- People who drink water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages or fruit juices gain less weight over time.

Sugar and Health

- Consuming too much sugar can lead to weight gain, health problems like heart disease and diabetes, and poor dental health.
- Sugary drinks are a major cause of obesity.
- Sugary drinks don't fill you up as much as solid food with the same amount of calories.
- Drinking one can of sugar-sweetened soft drink a day could add 15 pounds to your weight in a year.

Sweet Consumption

- A 20-ounce bottle of sugar-sweetened soda contains the equivalent of 16 teaspoons of sugar.
- Don't be fooled: fruit juice contains as much sugar and calories as soft drinks.
- Each day half of Americans consume sugary drinks, with 5 percent drinking the equivalent of at least four cans of soda.
- Sugary drinks outrank pizza as the top calorie source in the diets of teenagers.

Sugary Drink Lingo

- The term "soft drink" means any beverage with added sugar or other sweetener, including:
 - soda/pop/cola
 - fruit punch
 - lemonade and other "ades"
 - energy and sports drinks
- A sugar by any other name would still taste as sweet. Sugar can also show up as high fructose corn syrup, glucose or sucrose, or cane syrup and others.

Whole Foods Diet Basics

If you're used to complicated diet rules, or cards and books for counting calories, you'll be surprised by the simplicity of the whole foods diet. Basically it comes down to one rule—every meal and snack starts with single-ingredient foods that look the way they did when they were first harvested.

For salsa, that means starting with fresh tomatoes, onions, herbs and spices. For bread, gathering together freshly-ground whole wheat flour, yeast, a little honey, some nuts and seeds, and mixing, kneading and baking it into a tasty loaf. Of course, you can grind your own flour or keep your own bees, but starting small works, too, with each step leading to the next.

"The whole foods approach is truly a journey," says Fornshell. "Identifying where you are and taking baby steps in the right direction will ultimately save time, save money and yield a better health outcome at a healthier weight."

A whole foods diet includes many fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans and other legumes, nuts and seeds, and oils rich in omega-3

fatty acids like olive oil. And unless you choose to go vegan or vegetarian, you can add in some omega-3-rich fish like sardines and herring, and lean animal protein like organic or grass-fed beef, buffalo and chicken.

The single-ingredient rule will guide you most of the way, but you can fine-tune your diet as you acclimate to your new flavor climate. Later on try adding more low-glycemic vegetables—those that don't convert easily to sugars in your body—to your meals, such as such as asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale and spinach.

Also, slowly reduce your intake of refined sugars, opting instead for natural sweeteners like crushed grapes, chopped dates or small amounts of honey. And cut back on refined flours, found in breads, pastas and cereals. Overall, make vegetables the centerpiece of more of your meals and snacks. As long as your diet is varied, you can never eat too many vegetables.

Tips for Making Changes

As with most diets, knowing what to eat is the easypart.

It's changing your eating habits that is challenging, especially when you're accustomed to the standard American diet of fast food, junk food and ketchup as your favorite vegetable. Reducing temptation from day one, though, will go a long way toward healthier eating.

"The first step is always getting the boxes out of the house," says Fornshell. "We know that you almost can't win if you have these processed foods in the house."

You can always do a full purge of your cupboards, but for most people a gradual approach is best. "It's a very long and slow curve to change palates," says Pam Dannon, a registered dietician with the School Health Initiative Program, who works with some of the toughest food critics—children.

If the thought of cleaning out your cupboards is a bit frightening or even overwhelming, then chances are you might need a little boost in your transition to a whole foods diet.

"Instead of buying something new to help you as a tool for weight loss," says Fornshell, "maybe

THE 5 WORST "HEALTHY" FOODS

If you're trying to lose weight, it should be easy to identify which foods are healthy and which are not. But sometimes it's not that simple. Here are a few of the top less-than-ideal foods trying to pass themselves off as "healthy."

1 DIET SODA

Technically not a healthy food, but we often turn to artificially sweetened beverages to get our sweet fix without all the added calories. But these can throw off your taste buds, making even the juiciest, freshest apple pale in comparison.



2 WHOLE GRAINS

This term is the nutrition equivalent of green-washing, with countless products—good and bad—lining up to claim this stamp of approval. But many of those packages with the "Whole Grain" banner at the top are loaded with sugar, which diminishes any gains you get from the healthy grains.



3 GRANOLA

Once associated with healthy, free-loving hippies, granola is now mainstream, which means it's also loaded with oils, sweeteners and often unhealthy flavor-boosters like caramel, chocolate and sugary dried fruits. Want healthy granola? Make your own.



4 YOGURT

High in calcium, tasty and convenient—who doesn't love yogurt? But unless you're looking for a yogurt that is low in sugar and fat—think authentic Greek yogurt—you're most likely taking in more sugar than you need and only minimal amounts of protein.



5 VITAMIN-INFUSED WATER

Water is good for you. So are vitamins. So why not together? Well, yoga and Sudoku are great, too, but no one wants to do them at the same time. Besides, many of the vitamin-infused waters are also loaded with sugars, basically undoing your vitamin boost. So drink your water plain. And get your vitamins from whole foods.



"Often when people are dealing with weight issues," says Fornshell, "they believe they need to buy something special—a special product, a special weight loss powder, a special pill—to help them achieve their goal."

One thing that quick fix diets don't teach you is how to eat healthy over the long run. This is the key to keeping the weight off and reducing your risk of common food-related conditions like heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers.

The whole foods approach provides a slower-paced alternative to fad diets, and it's a movement reminiscent of a time when people grew their own food or knew the farmers who did. For Fornshell, and others like her, this return to basics is a way to offset the rising tide of obesity, a condition that affects more than one-third of American adults.

"Looking at the various types of whole foods," says Fornshell, "all the answers are right in front of us."

While prepackaged convenience foods come in an ever wider array of brands and flavors, many of them no longer resemble the nutrient-dense foods that first entered the factory.

"You're eliminating a lot of the healthy natural

nutrients that Mother Nature has already gifted us with," says Fornshell.

New Foods and Flavors

Take white flour, for example. Overprocessing has stripped it of many nutrients, including fiber, folate, riboflavin and several B vitamins. In addition, a slice of white bread will cause your blood sugar to spike more rapidly than whole wheat bread. These sugar spikes—and subsequent drops—can leave you hungry and irritable shortly after eating.

In addition to reducing the nutritional value of foods, processing can also result in new ingredients being added to the final food product. Read a few labels the next time you're shopping and you'll likely find ingredients straight out of a chemistry lab manual. A large part of the whole foods approach is about shifting your diet toward recognizable foods and avoiding additives and chemicals. But how can it help you lose weight

and keep it off? "If we can focus on those foods that come in their natural state, in their unprocessed states," says Fornshell, "it's easier to implement better portion control while gaining more healthy nutrients from your foods."

When you look at MyPlate, the current nutrition guide published by the United States Department of Agriculture—or its predecessor, the Food Guide Pyramid—you'll quickly see that it's nearly impossible to sort many prepackaged foods into food categories.

"If you're not sure what's in your food because it is so overprocessed, then you don't know where to put it on the plate," says Amy Lazev, supervisor of the School Health Initiative Program, a partnership between the Williamsburg-James City County School Division and the Williamsburg Health Foundation.

But the whole foods approach is more than just a tool for losing weight. It's about building the foundation of a healthier lifestyle in an exciting new way.

"The whole foods diet is so much more fun because it's an exploration in new flavors," says Fornshell.