



Sue Ann Says: Manage Your Weight Wisely in the New Year

I love a good sweet roll. And from time to time, I choose to savor one without guilt because I know I will eat sensibly the rest of the day. But I didn't always have this approach to my cravings. I tried diets where I shunned the foods I loved, only to find myself getting pried from the donut box mid-February.

One in five American women say their new year's resolution involves losing weight, and every year their resolution falls short. More than 60 percent of U.S. adult women are overweight, and just over one-third of overweight women are obese. Why are so many of us struggling?

Diane Olson, a clinical nutritionist with the University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics and a registered dietitian, told me that diets fail nearly 95 percent of the time. She outlined some of the major reasons:

- Diets typically force us to eat very restrictively. It's almost impossible to sustain that.
- Diets often leave us over-hungry and susceptible to overeat.
- Diets don't address the psychological reasons for food choices.

What happens when diets don't work? Old habits resume and we gain weight. We yo-yo. We feel like failures. Being overweight isn't just a matter of self-image. It's a vital health concern. Diane explained that overweight is defined by having an excess of body weight compared to set standards (usually the body mass index, or BMI.) But that weight might come from muscle, bone, fat or body fluids. Obesity refers specifically to having an abnormally high proportion of body fat. Both overweight and obesity increase a woman's risk of heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes.

The mental components of weight management

Diets don't work because they take the wrong approach, Diane emphasizes. "Diets focus on numbers – the numbers on the scale and on the calorie chart. Breaking this mindset is the first step in what I call mindful weight management."

Diane's approach focuses not on the numbers, but on our behaviors. "Instead of eating restrictively or avoiding certain foods, we must learn to eat in moderation and be aware of our food choices," Diane explains. "For instance, if a diet doesn't allow chocolate, the dieter learns to eat from avoidance rather than moderation. But on a very stressful day she might have a piece of chocolate. Then she feels so guilty, she eats the whole bag. It's okay to eat foods you love sometimes. Just be mindful of why you are making that choice and also control the portion."

Likewise, Diane encourages women to be aware of their calorie intake but not to obsess about it. Think about food intake as a financial budget. Learn how to get the most nutritional value from what you eat. (Check out the new food pyramid at www.mypyramid.gov for ideas.) Before you spend 600 calories on a cookie, decide that it is what you really want.

Diane suggests eating smaller meals more frequently to help subdue ravenous appetites. Choose healthful snacks that fill gaps in your nutrition, like eating an apple instead of that cookie.

She also recommends that women assess what they eat and when they do it. Are there emotional or physical triggers that cause you to overeat or inhale chocolate? Do you eat when you are bored or overstressed?

Diane says an environment that doesn't support weight-management is a big obstacle for women. Identify those obstacles. For example, are your husband and children not so eager to eat healthy too? Do you have a hard time staying away from the office treat table? Once you uncover the obstacles, you can find solutions. A dietician or mental health counselor can help reveal your food triggers and environmental challenges and find ways to manage them.

Putting your plan into action

- Goal setting: Focus on your behavior, not the numbers on the scale. Think about what, when and why you are eating and evaluate what you can do to promote healthy choices.
- Be realistic: Don't get caught up in the "all or nothing" approach. This ideal of perfection can set you up for failure. Instead, work on small, modest improvements each day.
- Be active: Fitness is an essential part of weight-management. Even if it's only 10 minutes a day, exercise makes a difference.

"Women who take this approach feel empowered when they begin to lose 1 to 2 pounds a week and can sustain that," Diane told me. I'm all over that one. If weight management is a concern for you too, I hope you'll join me in this sensible approach. Because it all begins with a healthy woman.

Yours in good health,



Sue Ann Thompson
Founder & President
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The Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation (WWHF) is a statewide non-profit organization whose mission is to help Wisconsin women and their families reach their healthiest potential. WWHF presents women's health education and outreach programs, funds women's health research, provides scholarships for women in academic medicine, and publishes resource materials. Your donations help WWHF reach

women all over Wisconsin with the information, resources and tools they need to be healthy. To make a donation or to learn more about WWHF, visit www.wwhf.org or call 1-800-448-5148.

Sidebar (from UW Health Web Site)

Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on height and weight, and is the most commonly used method to determine if someone's weight increases their health risks. Calculate your BMI by visiting <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>. Then, use the chart below to see what category you fall into.

BMI	CATEGORY
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5 - 24.9	Healthy
25.0 - 29.9	Overweight
30.0 - 39.9	Obese
Over 40	Morbidly obese