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Six Ways to Scale Up Diet Success

By NANJI HELLMICH

Experts who work with overweight patients have written diet books that offer practical advice on getting started and sticking with a weight-loss program. USA TODAY asked six authors to share their insights on the best ways to slim down:

The Structure House Weight Loss Plan

Gerard J. Musante: Psychologist and founder of the residential facility Structure House in Durham, N.C.

“Write yourself a letter. Start with ‘Dear Me,’ and describe what it’s like to be you right now. Let yourself know how dissatisfied you are. Capture everything you are feeling now so that you can read it in the future to help you maintain your motivation.

“Here are some statements that Structure House participants have used: ‘It’s getting harder to find clothes that fit right’; ‘I feel furious at myself when I overeat’; ‘Sometimes I think people are staring at me.’

“Reach into your heart and soul. Explain what you are going through and why you’ve decided to change your life. Describe in the bluntest possible terms how you feel and what you find frustrating. This letter will give you perspective in the future.”

The Duke Diet

Martin Binks: Psychologist at the Duke Diet and Fitness Center in Durham, N.C.

“Many of our most successful clients tell us that good support systems are essential. So as you begin your program, it will be important for you to rally the troops around you. Who will be your staunchest allies? Your family, spouse or partner? Friends or a trainer at your health club?

“It’s important to consider this question carefully. Some people who will be supportive in other areas may not be the right ones for weight loss. Many people can be unhelpful despite their best intentions.

“With good communication, you can help people who want to help you.”

The Eating Well Diet

Jean Harvey-Berino: Chairman of the Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences at the University of Vermont

“One of the leading causes of overweight is not knowing how many calories you consume in a day. Here is a simple formula. Multiply your weight in pounds times 12 to get your weight maintenance. So if you weigh 150 pounds, you need roughly 1,800 calories. Cutting 500 calories each day adds up to a loss of one pound a week. Keeping a food diary really works. You learn not only about your calorie intake, but about the behaviors and circumstances that prompt you to eat.”

The Sierras Weight-Loss Solution for Teens and Kids

Ryan Craig: The Academy of the Sierras, residential schools for obese teens in Reedley, Calif., and Brevard, N.C.

“Adults may be able to follow fairly complex weight-loss regimens, but for kids it needs to be really simple. We do three things. We train kids to try to eat less than 20 grams of fat a day.

“We tell them to try to get over 10,000 steps a day. We have them wear a pedometer. And we train them to self-monitor consistently, that is, keep a journal of everything they’re eating in terms of portions, calories and fat grams — and log their steps every day.”

Fit to Live

Pamela Peeke: A physician in Bethesda, Md.

Peeke tells patients to burn 400 calories a day with some type of physical activity, such as walking, dancing or working out on the elliptical trainer. She also encourages strength training: “One, it contours the body and gives you the best shape your genetics will allow. Two, you are definitely stronger and more

fit to live your life. Three, it's easier to shed pounds and reduce your belly size because you burn more calories with trained muscles.”

The Beck Diet Solution

Judith S. Beck: Director of the Beck Institute for Cognitive Therapy and Research in Bala Cynwyd, Pa.

“Overcoming cravings is a skill you can learn. Copy the following message and read it several times a day, every day, even when you’re not having cravings: ‘I know I have a strong urge to eat, but I don’t need to pay attention to it. It’s uncomfortable, but it’s not an emergency. If I eat, I’ll have a few moments of pleasure, but then I’ll feel terrible. I’d rather be thinner and healthier, look better, be less self-conscious and have more self-confidence.’

“Keep practicing these ideas; they’ll become second nature, and you’ll be surprised how quickly you can make your cravings go away once you firmly say no and get engrossed in another activity.”