

Ask Leyla: Which is most important for weight loss: exercise or diet?



Q: I've been trying to lose weight, but I'm not sure whose advice to follow. I know that it's important to both eat right and exercise, but is one more important than the other? If I ramp up the exercise, can I cheat a little on the diet?

A: Truth be told: Approximately 80% of weight loss success depends on diet. Remember, your metabolism is influenced by the type of calories you consume. Carbohydrate calories will tend to be stored as fat because it ramps up insulin secretion, whereas fat and protein calories (within reason) will tend to be burned as energy. ✖

I love this question because so many mistakenly believe they can eat whatever they want because they're exercise warriors or feel they should be rewarded with a bowl of ice cream after a six-mile run. Most of the benefits of that run are now injured because sugar consumption within a few hours after exercise reduces secretion of human growth hormone. That includes fruit-flavored yogurt because it's actually yogurt with jam, or that "healthy" granola bar. Eating this way regularly can raise triglycerides, an independent risk factor for heart disease and fatty liver disease.

And we know that carb-loading is no longer the best way to go for many exercisers. Indeed, replenishing glycogen is Phase I of fat storage. Wouldn't you rather be burning fat than glycogen the next time you exercise? Unless you're an elite or endurance athlete, carb-loading is not necessarily your friend.

Now, having said all this, exercise is *still* a very important component of weight loss. Cardio helps to burn calories while weight training increases metabolism. By strengthening major muscle groups, we torch more calories—even at rest. Strength training three times a week is optimal to build lean body mass.

And exercise confers so many more benefits to health than just weight loss.

Eat well and move your body for a healthy life and weight loss will be a beneficial side effect.

To your health!

As you may know, I've been doing a weekly "Q&A with Leyla" podcast feature with Dr. Hoffman. Now you can get my perspective and expertise every Friday on my own episode of the *Intelligent Medicine* Podcast. If you missed last week's, you can [listen here](#). To be sure you don't miss out on any of my important insights and information, **subscribe today!**