

The 30 Pound Club

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Weight-Loss Math

I got an interesting question from a reader this past week. I had said in a message that in order to lose one pound a week, a person should reduce their caloric intake by 500 calories per day. More accurately, we need to consume 500 calories a day less than what our bodies use. We can accomplish that caloric deficit three ways: eating less, moving more, or a combination of the two. The later is probably the best approach because we need to be fit. But he didn't understand why that translated into a pound per week. So, I thought I would explain the math behind how a person could lose 30 pounds in six months.

First, some background information. There are about 3,500 calories in a pound of fat. If we reduced our intake by that much in a week, we could theoretically lose one pound of fat. Divide the 3,500 by seven days in a week and you can see where the 500 calories per day comes from.

The problem is that we never lose just fat. If we have less mass to carry around because we weigh less, we don't really need as much muscle, so some muscle loss is inevitable—maybe even desirable. I know the gurus say you have to train to hang on to muscle mass so you lose only body fat, but why? If you weight 30 pounds less, you don't need as much muscle to haul your body around. Think about it—the calf muscles of a 400-pound guy would look wrong on a 140-pound guy. I'm a strong advocate for strength training, but no matter what you do, you'll lose the muscle you don't need. The upside is that the muscle you keep will look better because it's not wrapped in so much fat.

Whether we're losing muscle or fat, it doesn't change our approach. To lose a pound or so a week, we want to reach a daily caloric deficit of about 500 calories.

30 Pounds

Let's look at the numbers behind losing 30 pounds. Multiply 30 by 3,500 and you get 105,000 calories. We're doing this in six months and that's about 182 days. Divide the 105,000 by 182 days and you get 576 calories per day—right in the ball park of our 500 calorie per day target. That means if we did lose weight in a linear fashion, we would lose 2.6 ounces per day.

Or you could just say, "If I lose a pound a week, I'll lose 26 pounds in six months." To reach 30 pounds, you'll need a few weeks that are even better—a loss of a pound and a half or two pounds.

The problem is that we don't lose weight in a linear fashion. We also don't lose only fat. So as long as we keep our target in sight—the goal of losing 30 pounds—we'll get there because over six months, the numbers will balance out; some weeks we'll lose several pounds and some weeks we won't appear to lose any. The numbers will work as long as we stay consistent and stay on track.

Think of it this way. If you weigh 215 pounds, you need a certain number of calories to maintain that weight. If your goal is to weigh 185 pounds, it stands to reason that you'll have to be eating less and/or moving more once you get there. All you're doing is eating and moving like you probably will once you get to where you want to be.

That's why it must be a lifestyle change. If you're trying to get there doing things you hate—eating foods you don't like, and exercising in ways you don't want to continue doing—you're never going to make it and you're never going to sustain it. I want you to make it, so every little lifestyle change you make, like using a smaller plate every day, should be something you can continue for the rest of your life. Finding what works will be different for each of

us. That's to be expected. I won't let you quit because as I've said many times, when New Year's Eve rolls around this year, one resolution we won't have to make is losing weight in 2011.

Contract

Last week I sent out an Accountability Contract Form. Many of you emailed and faxed them to me. Paula and I exchanged ours. Those of you who didn't send it to me, I hope you printed it and gave it to someone else. If you still didn't complete it, send or fax them to me. Until you write it down, it's just wishful thinking. Remember, our purpose is one and done—do this once and never have to do it again. The contract is one of the steps in that process.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

P.S. Thanks to all of you who offered help getting The 30 Pound Club going on Facebook. Paula did the exact same thing she'd done several times before and it finally worked. If you've signed up for The 30 Pound Club at drchet.com, you've been invited to join; if your invitation went astray, you can log on to Facebook, find The 30 Pound Club Group, and request membership. To reduce confusion, we closed the Page, where you could become a fan, and kept the Group, which is more private than a Page or a Profile because most of the content is limited to Group members—you must be a member to post on the Wall, Discussion Boards, or photos. Of course, you must also have a Facebook account. If you've joined the Group, log on and post something—how is the process going for you, what snags have you hit, what happy surprises have you had? Let's start talking!



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