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95 Percent

One of the statements heard most often regarding weight loss is that 95% of the people who lose weight gain it back. That statistic is often cited by those who want more money to fund research to find out why we can't lose weight; it's also cited by people who say weight loss is pointless. I'm not opposed to studies on weight loss, because there's a lot that we don't know. The problem? That statistic is wrong.

It's from a study published in 1959, but it wasn't actually stated in the paper. If the criterion for success for weight loss was to lose more than 40 pounds, only 5% of the subjects achieved it. For those who participated in the weight loss study at New York City Hospital, only 2% maintained the weight loss for two years or longer. No where in the paper does it say that 95% of the people who lose weight gain it back, but that research paper is the source of what you and I still hear today.

Why write about it? Because if people hear that statistic often enough, they could start to believe it: "Why bother to try? I won't make it."

Don't you believe it. First, why do you assume you're not in the 5% who keep it off? Negative thinking won't get you to any goal, let alone one as challenging as weight loss. Resolve to be a five-percenter.

Second, the statistic you should focus on is this one: 100% of the people who change their lifestyle lose weight and keep it off. That's where I've fallen short and Paula as well—temporarily changing our lifestyle or making incomplete changes. We all have to change how we eat, how we exercise, and how we care for our health, and then maintain those changes for life.

Losing weight isn't easy and it takes time, but if you want it enough—it's yours. It all depends on one thing:

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

Reference: Arch Int Med. 1959; 103:79-85.

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