Overpowering Obesity

Do you maintain a balanced diet and stay active each day? Eating well and being physically active are keys to success in obesity prevention. Obesity can lead to consequences on our nation's health and economy and is linked to a number of chronic diseases, including coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some cancers. Most lifestyles of Americans are characterized by unhealthy options when it comes to diet and physical activity. We need everyone’s help to overpower obesity and lead to healthier and smarter meal plan and physical activity options. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010* exemplifies strategies that focus on consuming fewer calories, making informed food choices and being physically active to help Americans maintain their weight, reduce their risk for chronic diseases and promote overall health. To lose weight a person must eat fewer calories than what he or she expends. To maintain weight, one must expend the same amount of calories that are consumed.

Fruits and vegetables are major contributors of a number of nutrients that are under consumed in the U.S. and are associated with reduced risk of many chronic diseases. Vegetables with more fiber and less starch such as dark leafy greens, broccoli, and carrots are relatively low in calories and can replace high calorie foods that aid in weight gain. Starchy vegetables such as corn and peas, as well as fruit should be limited to one serving per meal. Therefore, fill half your plate with non-starchy vegetables at every meal and snacking occasion.

Eating a variety of grains, including whole grains, allows adequate fiber intake into our diet. Whole grains are a source of nutrients such as iron, magnesium, selenium, B vitamins, and dietary fiber. Moderate evidence indicates that whole-grain intake may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and is associated with a lower body weight.
Meat or poultry should be lean or low-fat. By choosing healthier options, calorie and fat content can be reduced. Moderate evidence has emerged about the health benefits of consuming seafood. Therefore, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010* recommends an intake of 8 or more ounces per week. Because oils are a concentrated source of calories, Americans should replace solid fats with oils, rather than add oil to the diet, and should use oils in small amounts.

Conserving calories is important and the healthiest way to reduce caloric intake is to decrease one’s consumption of added sugars, fats, and alcohol, all of which provide calories but few or no essential nutrients. A large proportion of added sugar in the American diet comes from the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.

Physical activity is important in maintaining a healthy weight as well as disease prevention. According to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010*, children and adolescents should do 60 minutes or more of moderate physical activity every day, while adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most, preferably all days of the week. For all individuals, some activity is better than none. Physical activity is safe for almost everyone, and the health benefits of physical activity far outweigh the risks.

Overall, obesity can be prevented if individuals follow a balanced diet and participate in moderate physical activity daily.

**References**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; www.cdc.gov/obesity

*Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010*; www.dietaryguidelines.gov

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