

Real Common Sense

February 2022

A Weighty Subject – Part 1

Hello, this is Dr. Ellen. As we enter the second month of 2022, I am very pleased to hear how well my first newsletter was received. That newsletter gave an overview of the immune system and ways to optimize its function. If you missed January's newsletter or would like to see it again, go to my website, www.drellencutler.com, bring your cursor over 'Dr. Ellen's Approach', and scroll down to and click on 'Articles'.

This month's newsletter will cover some of the many useful ways which I have found can help people optimize their body weight for better health and wellness. These approaches, in turn, can help improve the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of your life. This is such a large topic that I will be breaking it down into two parts.

Enjoy and please use the information that works for you!

Health Problems with Excess Body Fat

The fatty [adipose] tissues of your body are loose connective tissue made up primarily of fat cells [aka adipocytes] that store biochemical energy in the form of fats [lipids]. Adipose tissue acts to cushion different body parts, insulates the body from heat and cold, and has been found to function as an endocrine gland, secreting hormones such as leptin and estrogen.^[1] Women have a higher ratio of body fat to lean tissue than do men and in general, body fat increases with age.^[2] There are two main categories of adipose tissue. The fatty tissues underneath the skin are called subcutaneous adipose tissue (SAT). Those that line internal organs in the abdomen are called visceral adipose tissue (VAT).^[1]

Increases in body fat can lead to an enormously wide range of maladies. Some of the many problems that may arise or predisposed to include type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, sleep apnea, fatty liver disease, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, certain types of cancer, kidney disease, and increased health risks during pregnancy.^[3] Enlarged fat cells can activate ongoing inflammation as well as the release of a range of factors that predispose an increase in insulin resistance and subsequently type 2 diabetes.^[4]

As VAT accumulates it can result in an increase in metabolic disturbances and even mortality. Paradoxically, modest increase of SAT can actually decrease insulin sensitivity and risk of type 2 diabetes. Unfortunately, obesity, ageing, poor nutrition, low physical activity, and other factors can decrease SAT's resistance to dysfunctional changes and can then actually contribute to metabolic dysfunctions.^[1] Although both abdominal VAT and SAT are linked to increasing risk of cardiac and metabolic problems, VAT definitely seems to be the greater risk factor.^[5]

Health Solutions for Excess Body Fat

The focus of many health care professionals wanting to help individuals achieve fat loss and an ideal body weight is on diet. This is an extremely important part of any healthy weight loss program, but certainly not the only piece of the puzzle. In Part 1, I want to first address dietary approaches with an emphasis on healthy weight loss and then discuss the main supplementation I have found to be the most helpful in assisting this, namely, digestive enzymes. In Part 2, I will be discussing additional pieces of the puzzle I have used and found of additional and many times crucial benefit - exercise, intermittent fasting, thyroid health, and an often-overlooked but very helpful piece for successful weight loss and its maintenance, mindful eating. I will conclude Part 2 with an overview of supplementation that might be helpful in addition to digestive enzymes.

Diets for Weight Loss

It seems that I hear about new diets and dietary claims for weight loss being made on an almost regular basis. Many are based on the experience of only a limited number of individuals who had successfully lost weight while on the diet. Many such diets claim they are 'based on scientific studies.' However, the studies used to support the claims are often based on laboratory findings or animal studies, without actual well-designed human trials to back them up. Importantly, I would like to quickly point out that I am not an advocate of what might be called 'fad diets.' Most so-called 'diets,' as opposed to dietary approaches, have not been found to help achieve healthy, long-term weight loss. Because of this, I will not be discussing fad diets.

I have always tried to individualize dietary recommendations for each person's desired goals and needs. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to the optimal diet for each person. Many focus on losing weight for the purpose of feeling and looking better. Feeling better about yourself and how you look should include having increased vitality and functionality as well as the sense of 'true beauty' radiating from within. Any dietary approach you choose to follow should contribute to these goals and certainly not decrease them. I will address this further in Part 2.

Whenever considering a dietary strategy for someone interested in weight loss, I always look at the overall health benefits of that particular approach. For many years, the low-fat diet was considered to be the best way to lose weight, with less regard sometimes given to the quality of the rest of the diet. The low-fat diet has been questioned repeatedly, first by Atkins and subsequently by others. One review (meta-analysis) of randomized, controlled trials^[6] compared low carbohydrate diets with low fat diets. This review found that each diet resulted in significant weight loss, but the low carbohydrate diet was associated with modest but significantly greater weight loss. Another review of randomized, controlled trials of at least one year duration was published the following year.^[7] It found that low-fat dietary protocols did not lead to greater weight loss when compared with higher fat dietary protocols of similar intensity. However, in studies specifically evaluating weight loss, high fat, low carbohydrate diets achieved modest but significantly greater long-term weight loss than low-fat interventions.

Perhaps the three best studied dietary approaches for weight loss are the two mentioned above, low carbohydrate and low fat, and the Mediterranean diets. A 2-year dietary intervention study^[8] found that the Mediterranean and low-carbohydrate diets were effective for weight loss and just as safe as the low-fat diet. There was similar limited caloric intake in all diet groups, even the low-carbohydrate, non-restricted-calorie diet; this may be advantageous for those not wanting to be on a restricted-calorie diet. There was improvement in some of the biomarkers monitored up to the 24-month point, despite the achievement of maximum weight loss by 6 months. Thus, the diets and/or the weight that had been lost continued to have health benefits.

I want to point out that the diets in the study above did emphasize eating ‘healthy’ foods.^[8] For example, those in the low-fat group were encouraged to eat low-fat grains, vegetables, fruits, and legumes and to limit their consumption of additional fats, sweets, and high-fat snacks. And importantly, those in the low-fat group were encouraged to eat vegetarian sources of fat and protein and to avoid trans-fats. This means that the low carbohydrate group was directed to eat a vegetarian diet.

Another dietary approach to weight loss that has gained some popularity of late is the ‘Plant Paradox Diet,’ which recommends a lectin-free diet. Lectins are found in all plants, especially in raw legumes and whole grains. Lectins have been called ‘anti-nutrients’ that may interfere with the absorption of minerals and other nutrients. There is limited research in humans documenting the deleterious effects of lectins on long-term overall health. In fact, some lectins may even provide health benefits.^[9]

On the other hand, the scientific literature has well documented the many benefits of eating whole plant foods.^[10] For example, most large studies of lectin-containing foods such as legumes and whole grains found lower rates of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and weight loss associated with them. Because of this, many in the field of nutrition believe the health benefits of eating foods with lectins far outweigh the potential harm of the lectins in these foods.^[9]

I have had a patient report to me that she lost weight because of a lectin-free diet and read anecdotes of others having successful weight loss by going on a lectin-free diet. For those concerned about the presence of lectins in their food, one could limit or eliminate the legumes, whole grains, nuts, 'nightshades' (such as tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, and eggplant), and other lectin-containing foods. Alternatively, they can prepare their foods in such a way as to destroy the lectins (such as boiling beans and grains). My main concern with such a dietary approach is the avoidance of many healthy plant-based whole foods.

Perhaps the one dietary approach most researched and supported by that research for positive health benefits including weight loss is a vegetarian diet. More specifically, the benefits of a whole food, plant-based diet, aka a vegan diet, have been well-researched and received increasing interest by the medical community. There are a growing number of medical doctors who have become ardent advocates for this, including Dean Ornish, Colin Campbell, Michael Greger, and Joel Fuhrman.^[11] For me, this should be the foundation from which a healthy dietary approach for weight loss is created, even if it is low-fat or low-carbohydrate.

My Dietary Recommendations for Weight Loss

This brings me to my fundamental recommendations for a healthy diet that can help shed excess pounds. The "Dr. Ellen dietary plan" is first based on meals composed of 'whole food, plant-based' ingredients. Ideally, this means plant (or mushroom) foods with as little as possible processing. Typically, each step of processing a food changes and often decreases its nutritional content.

Generally, a transition from an omnivorous to a plant-based diet is associated with weight loss. In multiple studies, there was a significantly greater weight loss in those eating a plant-based diet vs. those eating an omnivorous one.^[12] In a study of over 60,000 participants, measurements of body mass index (BMI) found significant difference between vegans and nonvegetarians, suggesting the ability of vegetarianism to protect against obesity as well as protection against the risk of type 2 diabetes (Pescatarian and semi-vegetarian diets seemed to provide intermediate protection).^[13] Also, in another study, over a five year period in those who had not changed their diet, the largest weight gain was seen in those eating an omnivorous diet, and the smallest weight gain was seen in those eating a vegan diet. Of note, the vegans were also found to have the highest intake of carbohydrates and lowest intake of protein, opposite the intakes found in the omnivores. These findings do not support the idea that a low carbohydrate diet is needed to lose weight.^[14]

I do not see the need for animal products in general and specifically recommend against animal proteins and fats. However, if a person feels the need to eat animal protein, animal products should ideally be limited to once per week. But again, eating no animal products is always preferable.

Of almost equal importance is 'No SOS', that is, little to no added sugars, oils, or salt. This means no added salt and consuming little to no sugars or oils. Sugars and oils have been extracted from the plants themselves. When they are contained within the plant source, they are accompanied by the full array of other nutrients, including fiber. These can then be considered whole food, plant-based ingredients.

My own diet is whole food and plant-based, and I am more specifically a predominantly raw vegan, which I have been for more than half my life. It has helped me retain my healthy body weight and my physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Modern technology has made available more choices for a raw vegan, including low temperature dehydration to create raw veggie chips and 'crackers,' and freezing and freeze-drying to retain all the nutrients in berries and other fruits and vegetables year-round.

I have found that raw veganism has helped me (and others) attain and maintain a vital and healthy weight. Likely a major reason I feel great on a raw vegan diet is that the naturally occurring enzymes in raw foods are left intact and not denatured by the heating process. Research has also shown that a raw vegan diet can improve heart health, reduce the risk of diabetes, and improve digestion. However, it is important for all vegans in general to supplement with vitamin B12 and likely vitamin D, which I usually prefer in its D3 form (which is not plant-derived). Studies have also reported that raw vegans may be low in certain minerals, such as iron, calcium, and zinc.^[15,16] These may need to be addressed as well.

Digestive Enzymes

In working with patients, I have discovered a consistent fact. No matter what the dietary approach, most people have found that their weight loss was more successful and that they felt better when taking a full spectrum of digestive enzymes before each meal. Initially, many sometimes forget to take their enzyme supplements before eating, but as time goes by it becomes easier to remember because of the anticipated benefits of taking them.

There are three main categories of digestive enzymes:

- Carbohydrate digesting enzymes such as amylase (breaks down starches), lactase (breaks down lactose in dairy products), and invertase (breaks down table sugar)
- Protein digesting enzymes such as protease (breaks down proteins) and peptidase (breaks down shorter parts of proteins)
- Fat digesting enzymes called lipase

I have seen digestive enzymes be an integral part of accomplishing successful and maintained weight loss. There is little doubt that digestive enzymes can help improve digestion and overall gut health.^[17] A well-balanced blend of digestive enzymes can help you lose and maintain healthy weight loss by improving nutrient absorption and removing waste products, enhancing

detoxifying mechanisms of the body, increasing fat burning, and supporting a healthy microbiome and decreasing Inflammation.^[18]

Another very important benefit of including digestive enzymes in a comprehensive weight loss program is decreasing the likelihood of developing food sensitivities which, in turn, can adversely affect your gut microbiome and immune system.^[19] Food sensitivities, in turn, can lead to changes in appetite and weight gain. This is a detailed subject which I will go into more deeply in a future newsletter. For now, feel free to look at my chapter discussing how to “Reduce Cravings and Lose Weight” in my book, “Micro Miracles”.^[20]

As I mentioned above, my next newsletter will be Part 2 on the topic of weight loss. I want to address the other interventions for weight loss including exercise, intermittent fasting, thyroid health, additional types of supplementation, and mindful eating.

Before ending this newsletter, I want to let everyone know about Dr. Cowan’s Garden. I have been using their products and recommended them to others. I use several of their organic, nutrient-dense vegetable powders. They also offer other products including a 100% grass fed ghee, about which I have received only positive feedback. Just click on the link <https://lddy.no/13nzs> to view their products. When you purchase product, enter: **DRCOWANSGARDEN** at checkout and receive 15% off your entire order.

By the way, in the near future, I am going to resume teaching ECM to healthcare practitioners. If you are a healthcare practitioner or know of one interested in my work, please contact Cynthia at cynthia@drellencutler.com.

Be well, be healthy, and remember...

“It does not matter how slowly you go, as long as you don’t stop.”

- Confucius

Dr. Ellen

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