Choosing a Safe Weight-Loss Program

If it seems too good to be true…it probably is!! The secret to weight loss is to burn more calories than you eat. You can do this safely by eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly. Many people can lose weight on their own; others believe they’ll do better by joining a weight-loss program that provides support, diet and exercise plans. Keep these ideas in mind when looking into weight-loss programs.

Basic Elements

All weight-loss programs should aid in healthy changes that help you lose weight and keep the weight loss over time. These programs promote healthy behaviors that help you lose weight and that you can stick with every day.

They should include:

- A plan to keep weight off over the long run.
- A guide on how to improve healthier eating and physical activity habits.
- Ongoing feedback, monitoring and support.
- Slow and steady weight loss of about 1/2 to 2 pounds a week.
- Medical care if you’ll be following a very low-calorie diet.
- A plan to help you keep the weight off after you have lost it.

Questions to Ask

Gather as much information as you can before deciding to join a program. Seek answers to the following questions:

What does the weight-loss program include?

- Does the program offer counseling and/or group classes to help you change your eating, activity and personal habits? The program should teach you how to change bad eating and lifestyle habits, such as lack of physical activity, that have led to weight gain.
- Are food choices flexible and suitable?
- Is there any training provided to deal with times when you feel stressed and slip back into old habits? The program should provide long-term ideas to deal with weight problems that may come up.
- Does the program encourage you to be physically active?
- Is the program geared toward keeping weight off?

Watch out for these false claims:

- Lose weight without diet or exercise!
- Lose weight while eating all of your favorite foods!
- Lose 30 pounds in 30 days!
- Lose weight in specific problem areas of your body!

Other warning signs to watch out for:

- Very small print.
- Asterisks(*) and footnotes.
- Before-and-after photos that seem too good to be true.
Does the program carry risk?

- Could the program hurt you?
- Could the suggested drugs or supplements harm your health?
- Is the program run by a health care provider or doctor?
- Is there ongoing health care provider oversight to ensure your safety?

How much does it cost?

- What is the total cost of the program?
- Are there other fees for medical tests?
- Are there fees for a follow-up program?

What results do people in the program typically have?

- What does the average person lose?
- How long do they keep it off?
- What percent of people complete the program?
- Is there any written information on these results?
- Are there fees or costs for diet supplements? Remember, fad diets and quick weight loss methods don’t provide lasting results. Weight loss methods that rely on diet aids, prepackaged foods or diet pills do not work in the long run.

What are the staff credentials?

- Who supervises the program?
- What type of weight-control certifications, experience and training does the staff have?

Sources:
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease at the National Institute of Health
Choosing a Safe and Successful Weight-loss Program
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