

Guidelines for choosing a Weight Loss Program

If you are thinking of joining a weight loss program, you can use this fact sheet as a guide to help you choose a program that is nutritionally balanced, safe and effective over the long term.

Steps You Can Take

Before joining a weight loss program, consider the following steps:

1. Don't be shy! Ask questions up front.

You should know what to expect from a commercial weight loss program BEFORE you join and start the program.

A healthy weight loss program includes all of these elements:

- Weight loss goal of no more than one kilogram (two pounds) per week.
- A nutritionally balanced diet that follows [Canada's Food Guide](#). The program should include healthy foods from all four food groups including vegetables and fruits, whole grains, low fat dairy, lean meats and meat alternatives, and small amounts of healthy fats at each meal.

Avoids skipping meals, fasting or cleansing which can be unhealthy.

- A maintenance plan that helps you enjoy a healthy lifestyle over the long term. Ideally, it includes a physical activity plan.
- Flexibility for your unique needs such as food likes and dislikes, allergies, eating out, cultural restrictions, etc.
- Gives information about costs of the program, including food or supplements.

2. Look for "Red Flags."

The weight loss industry is not regulated in Canada. It is up to you to choose a safe and trustworthy weight loss program. Here are some "red flags" that may tell you that a program does not meet your health needs:

- Promises fast weight-loss (more than one kilogram (two pounds) per week).
- Recommends a very low calorie diet plan (below 800 calories) per day) without medical supervision.
- Tries to make you dependent on their company by selling you products such as foods or supplements rather than teaching you how to make good choices from regular grocery store food.



- Does not encourage long term realistic lifestyle changes, including regular exercise and a healthy diet that suits your lifestyle and health.
- Employs salespeople who act as "counselors", but are only trained on the program and the company's products and not on healthy approaches to help you change your behaviour to help you lose weight.
- Requires you to sign a long term, expensive contract.
- Pressures you to sign up right away by offering a "special price".
- Does not tell you about risks that may go along with weight loss or their specific program (for example: if you have diabetes and take prescription medication, it may affect you differently after you lose weight).
- Promotes weight loss aids like starch blockers, fat-burners, herbs, supplements or amino acids that have not been scientifically proven to have any health benefits. Talk to a dietitian or other health professional to find out this information.
- Does not offer support or follow-up to help you lose weight and keep it off.

In general, if it sounds too good or too easy to be true, it probably is.

3. Decide if this weight loss program fits well with your lifestyle.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Can I see myself:
 - following the program (menu) plan for life?
 - enjoying the changed lifestyle long term?
 - being successful in this program?

If you answered no to any of these questions, then the program is likely not right for you.

Consult a Registered Dietitian

Talk to a Registered Dietitian who can help you lose weight in a way that suits your lifestyle. A dietitian can:

- review your current way of eating;
- develop an individual meal plan;
- teach you how to track your portion sizes and food choices to meet your weight loss goals; and
- offer resources that support your lifestyle changes.



Dietitians are available at some health units and centres, family health teams, or through some employee insurance programs.

Search 'Find a Dietitian' at Dietitians of Canada <http://www.dietitians.ca/find>.

Special Considerations

If you take prescribed medications, weight loss may require a change in your dose of medication. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

Children, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, individuals with chronic diseases, such as diabetes, and seniors should talk with their doctor, nurse or a dietitian before starting a weight loss program.

Additional Resources

Health Canada

- Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide <http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide>
- What is a Food Guide Serving? . <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/basics-base/serving-portion-eng.php>

Public Health Agency of Canada:

- Safe Use of Natural Health Products for Weight Loss <http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/health-sante/medicine-medicament/weight-amaigr-eng.php>

Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP)

- Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines <http://www.csep.ca/guidelines>

Dietitians of Canada:

- eaTracker and eaTracker App - Get personalized feedback on your daily food and activity choices . <http://www.eatracker.ca>
- Recipe Analyzer - Analyze your homemade recipes for a quick nutrient analysis and store your recipes http://www.eatracker.ca/recipe_analyzer.aspx
- Cookspiration and Cookspiration App - Recipes to inspire you <http://www.cookspiration.com/>



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