

Losing Weight in Unalaska

By: Dr. Donald Hudson

We talked briefly in a preceding article about what medical overweight, or obesity, is, and why it matters to you. Obesity is associated with many physical disorders, and can have a profound effect on our mental health and self esteem as well. This article will talk about the reality of trying to lose weight in Unalaska.

I have been coming to Unalaska for nearly 16 years and have shopped, lived and eaten here. The barriers to good eating and exercise that are most obvious to me are the following:

- There is difficulty getting the right quantity and quality of healthy foods.
- The climate does not lend itself to consistent outdoor exercise.
- Work schedules in Unalaska tend to use up much of the time we are awake.

We have all heard the lectures about how and why to eat healthy; that we should eat lots of fruits and vegetables; that we should eat no fat; that we should eat our meat baked or broiled, limit pork and eggs, etc. All of which is very well and good to say, but given our limitations in availability and the cost of fresh fruits, vegetables and meats here in Unalaska, it becomes very difficult to find good-tasting foods that are healthy. The foods that are easiest to get in bulk and that have the longest shelf life are usually not the healthiest choices. White rice, for instance, is high in carbohydrates, low in protein, and depending on how it is cooked, may be high in fats.

When we couple this problem with the long, difficult and frequently unpredictable work schedules, it is easy to follow the path of least resistance in terms of what we eat and how we cook those foods.

Of course, we all want to be beautiful, healthy, muscular, smart, witty and popular, and we would rather not have to work any harder than we already are to get that way. BUT. We have to start somewhere. And here in Unalaska, we have to work even harder at living the idea of a healthy life style than folks in less extreme environments.

What can you do? You can start by learning to develop the means of analyzing what you eat and how you exercise. There is no secret or magic pill, but the process does become easier as you do it. Here are the rules:

1. Commit to making changes in your behavior that will improve your health.
2. Picture in your mind what you want to look like. Develop a clear mental picture of what you want.
3. Break down your ultimate goal into smaller, attainable, time limited goals. For instance, set the goal of losing one or two pounds per month. Or set the goal to be able to touch your knees in two months, and your toes in six months.
4. Find a friend or friends to support you.
5. Check with your medical provider to make sure you develop a diet and exercise plan that will help and not harm you.
6. Choose a realistic exercise program and stick to it. If you have not exercised before, start gently. Walk for 30 minutes three times per week, either outdoors, at the PCR, or around in circles in your house. Go swimming several times per week. Lift hand weights. Do sit-ups and stretches in your living room while watching TV. Find something that works for you, that you will be able to do to increase your physical activity.

7. Pay attention to your diet. Read labels. Chose foods carefully. Do not skip meals – not eating is not good. Snacking is not only ok, but a good idea, as long as you chose your snacks wisely. Eating small quantities 6 – 7 times per day can help you control hunger and actually eat less.
8. Alcohol provides empty calories. Cut down the amount of alcohol you drink. Do the same for soft drinks. Increase the amount of water you drink.
9. Find time each day to relax and let go of stress, even if it is only 5 minutes per day. Stress can slow down your metabolism and increase your retention of fats.
10. Do not let setbacks or lack of apparent progress stop you. Keep trying. While you should consult with your medical provider before choosing a diet plan for yourself, here are a few general diet rules:

Calories:

Current weight x10 = daily calories to lose weight.

Current weight x11 or 12 = daily calories to maintain weight.

Current weight x13 = daily calories to maintain weight.

Proteins:

You need 0.5 – 0.7 grams per pound of body weight.

Fats:

Eat between current weight x0.1-0.3 grams per day.

The steps are easy to write, but they require hard work and dedication to stick to. Starting can be the most difficult, but as someone once said, “A trip of a thousand miles begins with the first step.” Good luck.