

Dr. Tavel's uncovered myths and facts about obesity



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Dr. Tavel is a physician specialist in internal medicine and cardiovascular diseases. He has presented numerous speeches and lectures to national audiences. His medical research includes over 125 publications, editorials, and two published books.

What are some of the myths and facts about obesity?

1 Omitting breakfast makes weight reduction more difficult.

FACT

Although scientific data are incomplete, this is probably a true statement for two reasons. First, after more lengthy overnight fasting, the body metabolic rate slows transiently, which means that food eaten at mealtime will be metabolized more slowly. Second, skipping breakfast may lead to overeating later in the day.



2 Physical-education classes in their current format play an important role in preventing or reducing obesity in childhood.

MYTH

Although this seems logical, objective studies have not substantiated this idea. Even though intensive exercise may achieve such a goal, current conventional school settings probably do not provide enough exercise to get there.



3 Eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains will result in weight loss or less weight gain, regardless of whether one intentionally makes any other behavioral changes.

FACT

This is true because these relatively low-caloric foods produce greater satiation and thus reduce the incentive to eat higher-caloric foods. Although generally accurate, there are many exceptions to this rule, meaning that attention must also be devoted to the overall diet. It is also recommended to provide smaller portions, only eat when hungry, and eliminate all desserts.



4 Weight cycling (i.e., "yo-yo dieting") is associated with increased eventual mortality.

FACT

This is true because comparative studies generally have demonstrated that mortality rates have been lower among persons with stable weight, compared to those with unstable weight.



5 Dietary reduction of calories will effectively reduce weight.

FACT

Unfortunately trying to go on a diet seldom works well in the long term. A conscious effort must be devoted to additional measures such as eating more vegetables or eating breakfast daily coupled with overall caloric reduction.



6 What are the most common obstacles to weight loss?

FACT

- Environmental influences such as family attitudes toward food, or large portions served especially when eating out.
- The frequent lure of unhealthy fast foods, especially when located in nearby neighborhoods.
- The frequent consumption of sugary beverages. Replacing them with non-caloric sweeteners does not result in meaningful weight reduction.



7 People can reduce their weight by using weight reduction medicines and without changing their calorie intake

MYTH

There is no scientific support for this contention. Unless a given product can reduce the desire to eat or interfere with digestion, I would not recommend people to buy these products.



What are the potential negative implications if people do not look after their weight?

The longer you are obese, the more likely damage to health will result. This includes not only risk for the traditional diseases (heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and cancer), but also excess weight produces more stress on the bones and joints of the lower body, resulting in chronic arthritis, low back pain, and sciatica. All these factors accord well with my many years of practice as an internist/cardiologist.