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## How Fruits and Vegetables Are Crucial to Post-Menopausal Women



(CBS News) Post-menopausal women often have a hard time losing weight. But, promising new research shows that there may be simple dietary considerations that may help shed pounds - and keep them off for good.

What's on the list of foods to avoid and items to chow down on? It's relatively simple: Eating less sugar, meats and cheeses and consuming more fruits and vegetables were shown to help long-term weight loss.

"With more than one-third of all Americans considered obese, it's clear that standard behavioral obesity treatment is producing poor long-term results," lead investigator Bethany Barone Gibbs, assistant professor at the [University](#) of Pittsburgh's department of health and physical activity, said in the university press release. "We found that some important behaviors differ for long-term versus short-term weight control among women in their 50s and 60s, who are already at higher risk for weight gain."

Traditionally, women are told to watch their calorie intake to lose weight, which may not be sustainable for long periods of time. Because post-menopausal women have a natural energy expenditure decline, it's even harder for them to lose and maintain weight.

"Not only does motivation decrease after you start losing weight, there are physiological changes, including a decreased resting metabolic rate," Gibbs said in the news release. "Appetite-related hormones increase. Researchers studying the brain are now finding that you have enhanced [rewards](#) and increased motivation to eat when you've lost weight."

Investigators looked at 481 obese and overweight post-menopausal women who had a waist size of more than 31.5 inches. Some of the group was instructed to join a lifestyle change group, which met regularly with nutritionists, exercise physiologists and psychologists. They

were instructed to reduce total, saturated and trans fat along with cholesterol from meat, dairy, fats, oils, baked goods, and snacks; **reduce energy** intake and increase foods high in soluble fiber. Eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains and items high in plant stanols/sterols known to lower cholesterol and omega-3 fatty acids like fish were also encouraged. Exercise toward the minimum goal of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical exercise a week was slowly introduced. If the participant wanted to, they were given tips on how to increase their exercise to up to 240 minutes per week.

The others were given the option of attending a health education group in which healthcare professionals educated the subjects on women's health, with no specific attention towards weight loss.

Weight was recorded at six months and 48 months. On average, the women in the lifestyle change group lost 8 pounds over the four years. In comparison, the women in the health education group lost only half a pound. However, 57 percent of the intervention participants and 29 percent of controls had maintained at least a five-pound weight loss.

In both groups, short-term weight loss during the first six months was attributed the most to eating less sugar and fried foods, as well as eating more fish. After four years, continued decreases in eating deserts, sugary drinks, meats and cheeses with increases in eating more fruits and vegetables helped increase weight loss, showing these practices were more appropriate for long-term effects.

"People are so motivated when they start a weight loss program," Gibbs said in the news release. "You can say, 'I'm never going to eat another piece of pie,' and you see the pounds coming off. Eating fruits and vegetables may not make as big a difference in your caloric intake. But that small change can build up and give you a better long-term result, because it's not as hard to do as giving up French fries forever."

Just how little of an change did people have to make? Adding two servings a day of fruits and vegetables from what they previously ate was shown to result in a three-pound weight loss four years later. Cutting down 16 ounces daily of sugary beverages also was linked a three-pound deduction in the same period of time.

Eating at restaurants less was also shown to have some impact on weight loss, but since dining out decreased regardless of weight loss at the 48 month mark, researchers hypothesized that it may have also had to do with **economic** factors.

The study appears in the September 2012 issue of the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

"This study provides a glimpse at why changes in eating patterns must be maintainable for weight loss to be sustainable," Connie Diekman, director of university nutrition at Washington University in St. Louis, said to HealthDay. She was not involved in the study.

Karen Giblin, president of the menopause support **organization** Red Hot Mamas North America, Inc. told NBC News that the study displays what so many menopausal women in America struggle with: the ability to shed pounds. She was not involved with the study either, but co-authored a book with Dr. Mache Seibel on the subject called "Eat to Defeat Menopause."

"I recall at age 25 if I wanted to lose five pounds I could do it in a week. Now, it takes far longer to lose weight," she admitted.

But simple things similar to what the study showed like making exercise an active part of her life, not skipping meals and snacking on healthier items like fruit or almonds helped her lose weight.

"It's so hard counting calories and keeping food diaries for years and years and years," Gibbs said. "We have a population-sized problem here."