

## Nutrition: Weight Loss – Part 3

Hey everybody, time for another case study. We're going to do one on weight loss.

R.J. was a 37-year-old female, 5'10" and 195 pounds. Her goal weight was 165 pounds, which would put her in a normal BMI category and help improve some of the weight-related symptoms she was having, including joint pain and immobility when exercising. R.J. had a history of disordered eating and yo-yo dieting but had not been diagnosed with an eating disorder. She also had mild eczema and gut symptoms, and occasional sleep disturbance. She was exercising quite a bit, five days per week at one hour per day, alternating between barre and yoga classes, spin classes, kettlebells, high-intensity interval training, and hiking. Her weight had been stable for the past six months, and she was feeling frustrated that her weight didn't budge despite sticking to a gluten-free whole foods diet and exercising regularly. When I reviewed her food journal, I noticed that many of the foods that she was eating, though always gluten-free and fairly high quality, were also very rewarding and high on the palatability scale. This included bacon and gluten-free waffles at breakfast, maple syrup in her tea, homemade French fries with garlic aioli at lunch, homemade gluten-free bread at dinner and goat's milk ice cream after dinner. R.J. admitted she was an emotional eater and tended to use food as a coping mechanism for stress. Unfortunately, this highly rewarding high-palatability diet ended up being high in calories as well, which made it hard for her to lose weight despite her active lifestyle.

I recommended she switch to what I call a simple Paleo diet. This is a Paleo diet that is lower on the palatability scale and lower in food reward. Now, reward in this context is a term from the psychology literature. Something that's rewarding means something that makes us want to do more of it when we do it, and foods that are highly rewarding or foods that have very complex flavors, foods that have a mixture of carbohydrate and fat, foods that are fried and grilled rather than slow-cooked or steamed. We'll talk more about this elsewhere in this unit, but in short, the easiest way to think about it is, if you have a bag of potato chips on one plate or just baked potato with no butter or salt on the other, it's going to be very difficult to overeat potato with no salt or butter, whereas it's very easy to overeat potato chips. So we switched her to the simple Paleo diet. I also instructed her to eliminate gluten-free baked goods like waffles and bread, stick to the whole starchy plants like potatoes and sweet potatoes, plantains, yuca with minimal salt or fat added. She would reduce her use of added fats across the board, outside of a small amount to cook the food itself. So no adding a half-stick of butter to sweet potato. We agreed she'd have one small planned treat per day to prevent her diet from becoming too restrictive, and she planned to use mindfulness practice while eating the treat so that she enjoyed it more. We also had to focus on her getting more protein at each meal. Protein is the most satiating macronutrient, and higher protein diets have consistently been shown to be more effective at weight loss, and some studies suggest that the reason that low-carb diets are effective is not because they're low in carbohydrate but because they're high in protein. So we advise a high percentage of calories from protein when a patient's trying to lose weight, typically at least 25 percent, and then plenty of non-starchy vegetables comprising about 50 percent of the plate,

and then a controlled portion of carbohydrate and fat, and she decided that tracking her diet would help her stick with it, and we established appropriate macronutrient ratios for her to use in her mobile tracking application.

After two months of these changes and tracking her food intake on a daily basis, R.J. had lost eight pounds and was down a size in her clothes. She struggled to stay on track a few times over that two-month period, but she was able to return to the plan after a few days of less healthy food choices. As she had a history of yo-yo dieting, sticking to a plan had been a challenge for her, but she found that this approach that we developed was a lot easier for her to follow because she wasn't hungry all the time, and the planned treats gave her some wiggle room and ability to enjoy herself on a daily basis. In addition to weight loss, she found that her mood was stabilizing, her sleep had improved, and she was less prone to getting sick. Her joint pain had also significantly improved, which is likely due to the avoidance of sugar and gluten-free grains, rather than the small amount of weight loss she experienced. Ultimately, the most successful part of this plan was that R.J. didn't feel like she was on a restrictive diet and didn't feel driven to binge after a few days of following the plan, which was typical for her in the past. With this simple Paleo diet, the first few days are always the most difficult. Patients tend to crave the more complex, rewarding, palatable foods they were eating before, but what tends to happen over time is, the simplicity of the diet really allows the flavors of the whole foods to shine through on their own, and once the patient makes the transition away from the more complex diet, just the taste of a carrot, for example, can seem really sweet and flavorful. So, you just advise your patients that this is going to be an adjustment, but in most cases, over time they start to really appreciate the simplicity of the diet. It's easier to cook, and they naturally eat less without trying more, and that's really the shangri-la when it comes to weight loss. Okay, that's it for now, hope this was helpful. See you next time.