

Diet and Exercise

More and more Hongkongers lose weight in pursuit of the perfect body. Some do so through diet only, while some do so through exercise only. How effective are these tactics? These single-pronged tactics manage to induce weight loss all the same, no doubt, but can they really eliminate excess fat in the body? Below are the results of the experiments done on the three tactics:

Weight-loss tactic	Change in fat weight (lb)	Change in net weight (lb)	Change in gross weight (lb)
Diet only	-9.3	-2.4	-11.7
Exercise only (*on prescription weight-loss exercise)	-12.6	+2.0	-10.6
Diet AND exercise	-13.0	+1.0	-12.0

*These three groups of overweight females went through a 12-week weight-loss programme at a steady weight-loss rate of 1 pound/week.

(Zuti, B. & Golding, L. (1976). Comparing diet and exercise as weight reduction tools, Physician Sportsmedicine, Vol.4, pp 49-54)

The study shows that all three tactics can result in weight loss to different extents. However, only the diet-only tactic results in net weight loss. Since most of our net weight is made up of muscle cells, decrease in net weight means decrease in fat-burning muscle cells, which can also lead to decrease in basic metabolic rate, thus posing more difficulty for further weight-loss effort.

Similar to diet, regular exercise (including aerobic exercise and weight training) is indispensable. Aerobic exercise can help burn fat without causing loss of net weight. One should spend at least 150 minutes per week on aerobic activities at moderate intensity, which include: walking, jogging, and swimming, and each bout of exercise should last between 30 and 60 minutes and take place at least 5 times per week. Meanwhile, one should also do weight training 2 to 3 times per week to prevent loss of muscle fibre. Each bout should be separated from each other by a two-day interval. Weight training can not only increase the net weight of a person, it can ensure zero

change in basic metabolic rate even in times of weight loss, and thus a continuous drop in body weight.

In pursuit of the perfect body shape, we should do appropriate exercise on top of a healthy diet. Nevertheless, the ideal rate of weight loss remains at 1 to 2 pounds (about 0.5-1 kg) per week. As long as you take the appropriate measures, weight loss is always possible!