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If you really must lose weight in 2020 these experts' strategies may help

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Each new year invariably brings in new diet, fitness and weight loss fads. To help you navigate the best strategies for losing weight and keeping it off in 2020, we asked three experts for their top tips.

While all three agreed there was no one-size-fits-all answer and that a personalised approach to weight loss is important, there are some key, evidence-based strategies that can help you shed unwanted kilos in the new year. Here they are:



It all about having some diversity in your diet and exercise regime, including eating more plant-based meals each week. *Credit: iStock*

Eat more plant-based meals

Melbourne dietitian [Melanie McGrice](#) says replacing meat or chicken-based meals with some plant-based alternatives several times a week can be a simple, but effective, weight loss strategy for many people.

“My number one tip would be to make sure that you’re including some plant-based protein in your diet each week. So, instead of having meat or chicken at every meal, replace it with some plant-based alternatives like legumes or tofu two or three times a week,” she says.

Several [studies](#) have shown people who eat a diet high in plant-based foods and low in animal-based foods have a lower body mass index (BMI) and lower rates of obesity than those who eat meat. In fact, one [recent study](#) found even moderate adherence to a vegetarian diet could prevent obesity in middle age.

Meanwhile, a small 2018 [study](#) found a plant-based diet was highly effective in treating obesity. In the study, researchers put 75 people who were overweight or obese on either a vegan diet or a controlled diet, which contained meat. After 16 weeks, only the vegan group showed significant weight loss (6.5 kilograms). The plant-based group also lost more fat mass.

While Ms McGrice is not suggesting we should all become vegans, replacing some of your meat-based meals with plant-based ones is an achievable weight loss strategy.

Many have dubbed this approach the flexitarian diet, or a semi-vegetarian diet, with a focus on eating healthy plant-based foods while still enjoying meat products in moderation.

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"While there are many benefits to substituting meat-based protein with plant-based proteins, from a weight loss perspective, plant-based proteins contain far less calories. So, for example, a serving of a 100 gram fillet steak is 745 kilojoules, compared to say the same quantity of lentils, which is only 323 kilojoules," Ms McGrice explains.

"So, by making a pretty simple change, people can start seeing some good results."

Gently, gently ... medium intensity body weight workouts

Sydney personal trainer [Ricardo Riskalla](#) says medium intensity workouts with a variety of cardio and body weight exercises are key to losing weight.

"The days of boot camps with people vomiting on the side has gone," he says. "Rather, the most effective exercise routine, is one that includes variety, rest days and doesn't make you push your yourself to the maximum limit to avoid creating more stress in the body."

While recent studies have [highlighted the benefits of high-intensity interval training \(HIIT\)](#) for weight loss, these studies look at the short-term benefits, not the long-term results.

Mr Riskalla argues a gentler approach to exercise means you are more likely to stick to it.

"At the end of day we must think about the longevity of the fitness routine and when pleasure is involved I guarantee you will stick to it for a long time," he says.

"The best routine for weight loss is medium intensity, long duration which involves body weight exercises (strength training exercises that use the individual's own weight to provide resistance against gravity) performed in a high number of repetitions.

"In my experience hardcore routines are dropped after a few weeks. Also, the variety of body weight exercises are endless, giving people great variation, which doesn't happen when exercising on machines. In terms of aesthetics, I also see more harmonious bodies with body weight exercises, and they are my go-to when working with actors and

models.”

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When it comes to how often people should exercise, Mr Riskalla recommends following a progressive routine.

“For example, if you never exercised and want to lose weight, start with walking once a week for one hour, then in the second week go twice a week and so on.

Exercises should also follow what we call periodisation, he says: some weeks must be harder than others in order to allow muscles to recover and to not create a burn-out situation.

"Above all, my recommendation is to never push yourself to a ridiculous number of hours daily. The old belief of 'the more, the better' is not applicable."

Cut out ultra-processed, carbohydrate-rich foods

Associate Professor Kieron Rooney, a metabolic biochemistry researcher from the University of Sydney, says removing the “junk sources of carbohydrates” from your diet can be life-changing for those wanting to lose weight in 2020.

"[Carbohydrates] are the most potent stimulator of insulin ... which stimulates the synthesis of fat and the storage of fat," he says.

However, not everyone should jump on the ultra-low-carb keto (ketogenic) diet that restricts carbohydrate intake to no more than 20 or 50 grams per day (compared with the average daily intake of about 300 to 400 grams).

“You don’t have to go that far,” he says. “I was part of a research group that had people down to 140 grams (of carbohydrates a day), which was a diet that still included bread and potatoes and a bit of pasta and people still lost weight.”

A more moderate approach to cutting carbohydrates, particularly from ultra-processed sources is more achievable and maintainable in the long term.

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“What you want to do is look for the junk sources of carbohydrates. So you can have a little bit of toast. I’m ok with that. And you can have a little bit of pasta even, and rice, most certainly. But to get away with that, you’ve got to make sure that you’re not also having the cake at morning tea or the muffin on the way home from work or the biscuits that are floating around your workspace ... because when you put that stuff in on top, that’s when you start overloading your system.”

Associate Professor Rooney adds that reducing your carbohydrate intake will also help you burn more fat when you exercise.

“We can put people on a bike in the lab and if you’re eating over 200 grams of carbs a day you are burning far less fat – up to half the amount – than an individual who is eating less than 200 grams of carbs a day for the same amount of exercise.”

Associate Professor Rooney advises people to look at the [NOVA food classification system](#), which categorises foods according to how processed they are, to help remove unnecessary carbohydrates from their diet.

“You should be aiming to remove as much of the processed and ultra-processed foods as possible... as well as liquid sugars, such as juice and cordial and soft drinks which are particularly bad,” he says.

He says a moderate approach to reducing your carbohydrate intake by eliminating processed and ultra-processed foods and drinks is more likely to ensure that you not only lose the weight but keep it off in the long term.

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