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With over two-thirds of the population of US overweight or obese many people are wanting to lose weight. It is important to remember that the best motivation for losing weight should be improving health and not losing a "magic" number of pounds. Here I provide facts to dispel some common myths that stand in the way of people achieving healthful and long-term weight loss. This is the first of a two-part series. Myth 1 - Skipping breakfast is a great way to lose weight
Fact, people who lose weight and keep it off eat breakfast regularly. Our metabolism (the process of breaking down our food into energy) is like a car engine. This engine will operate most efficiently if it is provided with a steady supply of high quality fuel. Start your digestive engine working optimally early in the day with breakfast so that you will have fuel for your day when you need it and you will burn calories more efficiently throughout the day,

Myth 2 - Drinking diet or sugar free sodas, teas or fruit drinks are a good alternative Fact, artificial sweeteners come with their own costs. They may contain no calories, but our body is not so easily fooled and there is mounting evidence that these artificially sweetened beverages are associated with increased weight gain over time and increased risk of diabetes. The use of artificial sweeteners also alters your taste buds to expect these unnaturally sweet tastes, making you crave sweeter and higher calorie foods over other more healthy alternatives.

Myth 3 - If it is low fat or fat-free it has got to be good for me and will help me lose weight
Fact, just because something is fat free does not make it healthy. These fat-free alternatives usually have a long list of additives that are replacing the fat. These fat-free alternatives will generally leave you feeling unsatisfied and you end up eating more. Remember also, fat free does not mean calorie free, there are plenty of calories in these foods and eating a whole pint of fat-free ice cream is a sure way to pile on calories and pounds.

Myth 4 - You have to feel hungry a lot, that is how you know you are losing weight
Fact, feeling hungry - that gnawing pit in your stomach, feeling low energy or irritable because you need to eat something is a sign that your blood sugar is low. Eating a diet that is high in processed carbohydrates (white flour, sugar, snack foods, white rice) can cause your blood sugar to go up and down rather quickly (even if you are not diabetic). However, finding ways to eat meals and snacks that will provide your body with a more constant source of high quality energy (moderate amounts of protein, some healthy fats and non-starchy carbohydrates at each meal) will prevent you from feeling hungry as often and let you to make healthier eating choices more often.

Myth 5 - I do everything by myself, losing weight is no different
Fact, human beings are social creatures. Eating is often a social affair done with our family and friends. Enlisting the support and participation of your network can increase your chances of achieving and sustaining healthy eating habits. It increases your support and accountability. Group-based weight loss programs are associated with more weight loss than individual-based programs. Use the power of the group even if it just one other person. Work together to make positive changes in your diet and life and you all will reap the rewards. Consider starting a group in your community or at your church (see my website for resources). In the end, you may have some people in your life who do not always support your food choices. There are ways to deal with these "food pushers". (See my website for links to helpful hints).

In my next article I will present five more weight loss myths.

The information contained herein should NOT be used as a substitute for the advice of an appropriately qualified and licensed physician or other health care provider. The information provided here is for educational and informational purposes only. In no way should it be considered as offering medical advice. Please check with a healthcare provider if you suspect you are ill.

Dr. Winbush is a family physician practicing at NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center. She has a strong interest in wellness and patient education to help individuals feel empowered to optimize their health and functioning. For more information and additional resources as mentioned in the article visit www.functionwellmedicine.com.