Obesity is a subject that continues to grab headlines. This is understandable when we realize that extra pounds carry with them increased risks of diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and even certain cancers. Furthermore, from a U.S. perspective, the majority of us are either overweight or obese.

Although being overweight and obese may seem like an unstoppable epidemic, there is good news. Natural strategies can help us lose weight. Let’s look at a number of these powerful principles.

**Keys to Weight Loss:**

1. **Don’t focus on diets; focus on habits.** Diets may work for a time, but changing habits is what yields long-term benefits. Choosing even one habit that you will change for the rest of your life is ultimately more powerful than dozens of changes you have no intention of continuing long-term.

   However, discussions about habits are fraught with misunderstanding. It is true that many individuals who carry extra weight are more health conscious than their thin neighbors. We can’t overlook the importance of genetic factors and early life history contributions to obesity. For example, while in your mother’s womb, you were metabolically programed to be more or less likely to be overweight. The same is true of diabetes and high blood pressure. Therefore, for many individuals it is not “their fault” they have weight issues. Given their predisposing factors they may have to work very hard to shed pounds—and may never be as thin as many less health-conscious individuals.

   Here are the two main points: (1) an overweight person is of no less value than one who is thin; (2) such individuals are often not “lazy” or “overeaters”; however, additional lifestyle changes can still yield powerful benefits in those prone to being overweight.

   Following the LifeStart principles can help you keep on a consistent program, one that can help you take charge of your health and your weight.

2. **Never make weight loss your sole focus.** Put your energies into developing the healthiest lifestyle possible. If you are overweight, such a program will generally help you decrease your weight gradually. The LifeStart principles are designed to provide such a heathy lifestyle foundation.

3. **Don’t be afraid to make lifestyle changes.** At first changing habits is hard. However, if you continue practicing a new habit, your body tends to adjust to your new way of living and develops an enjoyment for it. Indeed, research shows you can develop new habits and enjoy them just as
much—if not more—than your old ones. (For more information on this, check out my popular mini-series “Changing Bad Habits for Good” DVD.)

Don’t know where to start when it comes to lifestyle changes? Take a careful look at all of the LifeStart principles. Why not start with one that looks achievable and put that into practice today? (If you have concerns that any of the principles may pose a health risk, please first check with your healthcare provider.)

4. **Don’t be discouraged by past failures.** Most of us lose motivation when we fail. However, health behavior researchers point out that failures can be stepping stones to success. Here’s how it works: every time you slip back to an old habit, ask yourself what you did wrong. Once you realize where the potholes are in the road, you can drive around them next time! Consider this: while wrongfully imprisoned, the apostle Paul wrote: “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal…”¹ and “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”²

5. **Make exercise as close to a daily practice as possible.** Physical activity is truly a key when it comes to weight optimization. Think about it this way: Are you going to eat today? Are you going to sleep tonight? Sure, those are all given. It should be the same with exercise.

Although 30 minutes or more of aerobic (or “cardio”) exercise should generally be the target, even five or six minutes of activity gives significant physiologic benefits. In other words, most all of us should do something every day—even if pressed for time.

If you have questions about heart health (or other physical limitations or concerns), be sure to talk with a health professional before increasing your physical activity. If a health professional gives you the green light, the best weight loss activities generally involve large muscle groups (like your arms and legs).

6. **Make clean breaks with “problem foods.”** Problem foods are ones for which you cannot typically control your consumption. In other words, attempts to limit your intake of these foods typically fail. (You know what we’re talking about. If you can’t stop until you polish off a whole box of chocolates, or a half-gallon of ice cream, you’re talking about problem foods.) That’s right, common problem foods include ice cream, chocolate, and chips. It is important to realize such problem foods are individually determined: a problem food for one person might not be one for another.

Total avoidance of your problem foods is generally the only successful strategy. Just like an alcoholic or nicotine addict, occasional use is generally not an option. [Note: have you ever wondered why God gave ten commandments and not ten suggestions? And many of those commandments deal with making clean breaks with problem behaviors. This is not bad news. One popular Christian writer expressed the Bible truth of God’s instructions in these words: “All His biddings are enablings.”³]

Got the message? Identify problem foods, then make clean breaks with them. Yes, this seems like a very hard proposition in the short term, but it is really easiest in the long-term, as you free yourself to develop new enjoyments.

7. **“Eat to satisfy simple hunger, not appetite.”** This is perhaps the most powerful weight control principle available. Confused? Consider the following definitions:

- **Hunger**—a physiologic desire for food that reflects your body’s true needs
- **Appetite**—a mental desire for food that may or may not be in harmony with true physiologic need

**Note:** at birth our bodies knew the difference between hunger and appetite. However, our culture has educated us to eat when we are not hungry. The end result: if ample supplies of palatable food are available, most of us have learned to eat “until we are full” (i.e., until we cannot comfortably eat any more). The good news is this: your body still
has the capacity to distinguish between hunger and appetite.

Here’s some practices that can help you regain the ability to differentiate between hunger and appetite:

- **Eat slowly**—this gives time for your brain’s “satiety regions” to tell you when you’ve had enough.

  - **Techniques to slow your eating include:**
    
    a. *Chewing thoroughly* (the more you chew your food, the more satisfaction you tend to receive)
    
    b. *Not drinking with meals* (common mistake: using beverages to help “wash down your food”). The more liquid there is taken with the meals, the more difficult it is for the food to digest; for the liquid must be absorbed before digestion can begin.
    
    c. *Take small servings*—and don’t put serving dishes on the table (having to get up for seconds helps slow your eating tempo, thus providing more time for your brain to register satisfaction)
    
    d. *Put your fork down between bites*

- **Drink plenty of water between meals.** Thirst is often misperceived as hunger.

- **If you have a question as to whether or not your hunger is satisfied, leave the table.** Unless you are on certain diabetic medications or have a rare medical disorder, most individuals will have no ill effects from “undereating” at a meal.

  8. **Eat a good breakfast every day.** A good breakfast fortifies you against the temptation to snack on less desirable food items—especially early in the day. Furthermore, in the morning our bodies are geared to burn calories, while in the evening our physiology shifts toward rebuilding tissues—and regenerating fat stores. For example, one study found excellent weight loss by not eating after 3:00 PM each day. Avoiding large meals late in the day thus helps with weight reduction and increases the likelihood you will be hungry for a good breakfast the following morning.

  9. **Avoid snacking.** Some people lose weight by “grazing” on those oft-touted five, six, or seven meals per day. However, others gain weight on such a program. Indeed, the medical research suggests that the more frequently the average person eats, the more he or she will tend to weigh. Interestingly, the main benefit of “grazing” may be avoiding large evening meals. Of course, you can avoid a large evening meal and still eat only two or three times per day. Furthermore, avoidance of snacking (or other forms of frequent food consumption) has been associated with:

    - **Better physical endurance.** Glycogen stores (one of your body’s primary storage forms of easily accessible fuel reserves) appear to be better replenished with two meals per day than seven.
    
    - **Decreased colon cancer risk.** More frequent meals or snacks are associated with an increased risk of colon cancer.
    
    - **Weight loss.** If you eat the same number of calories per day, eating those calories in fewer meals will increase something called the “thermic effect of food,” which results in more calories burned.

  10. **Eat more plant-derived foods**: fruits, whole grains, and vegetables. A diet composed of only plant sources of nutrition (a vegetarian diet) has many health benefits. Although such a diet may be optimal, you don’t have to be a total vegetarian to benefit from eating more fruits, grains, and vegetables. A plant-based diet helps:

    - **Decrease caloric density.** Devoid of fiber and typically low in water content, animal products (meat, milk, eggs, cheese, etc.) are generally packed with more calories per volume than plant sources of nutrition. Consequently, if you eat the same amount, an animal product-based diet will generally give you many more calories than one centered around plant foods.
    
    - **Decrease fat consumption.** Most plant foods are low in fat—and a lower fat diet can aid in weight control. Fat in our food is easily stored as fat in our bodies. Compared to dietary fat, it takes more energy—and calories—for your body to make fat from protein or carbohydrate.
11. **Beware of calorie-containing beverages: opt for water instead.** Beverages tend to be associated with a low satisfaction per calorie ratio. In other words, you can ingest a lot of calories and get relatively little satisfaction. Implications: drink water between meals rather than beverages with calories. At meal time, opt for whole fruit rather than fruit juice, etc.

Also, limit—and ideally eliminate—alcohol consumption. Alcohol is a vitamin- and mineral-deficient, high caloric beverage. Gram for gram, alcohol has nearly twice as many calories as pure sugar! Furthermore, research indicates if you are watching your food intake, alcohol causes you to become more complacent and thus more likely to overeat.

Why not make a commitment to go through all the LifeStart seminars and put their powerful principles into effect? LifeStart can help put you in the driver's seat. Truly, you are not merely the victim of your genetics and your early life history. You can be a success.

**Summary**

The natural, lifestyle-based strategies found in the LifeStart acronym provide keys to achieving and maintain an optimal weight. To learn more about the nine strategies behind the LifeStart program, visit the LifeStart Seminars website and download the FREE LifeStart eBook. For best results, consult with your healthcare providers and tap into a local support center where you can surround yourself with a community of supportive peers. Our online directory will help you locate such individuals in your community. Our website also features a variety of resources to help you shed those unwanted pounds—naturally. These resources include books, DVDs, and other health products that I and other medical professionals have endorsed.

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**Endnotes**

1. Philippians 3:13–14 (The Holy Bible, New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. All rights reserved.)

2. Philippians 4:13 *(ibid)*