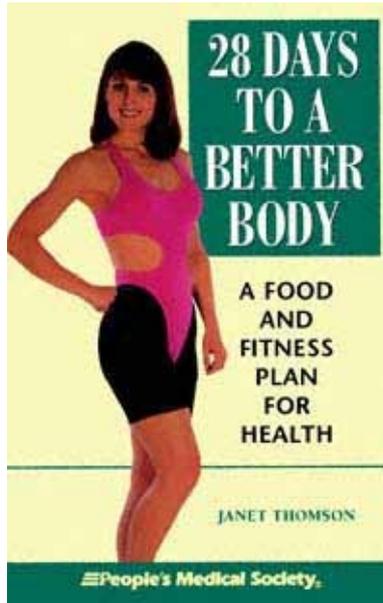


28 DAYS TO A BETTER BODY

A FOOD
AND
FITNESS
PLAN
FOR
HEALTH

JANET THOMSON

 People's Medical Society.



28 Days to a Better Body

A Food and Fitness Plan for Health

By Janet Thomson

≡People's Medical Society®

People's Medical Society
Allentown, Pennsylvania

The People's Medical Society is a nonprofit consumer health organization dedicated to the principles of better, more responsive and less expensive medical care. Organized in 1983, the People's Medical Society puts previously unavailable medical information into the hands of consumers so that they can make informed decisions about their own health care.

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Introduction

If you are serious about wanting to lose fat, then this is definitely the book for you! In it you will find lots of information about your body how it works and what it needs to survive as well as how to lose fat safely and effectively *for good*.

In this day and age, there is a lot of pressure to conform to certain images of ultraskinny women or lean, muscular men. As a result of this, many "normal" people feel inadequate and unhappy about the way they look. We have become so concerned with how we look that we are prepared to go to almost any length to try to achieve the body beautiful something that for most of us is unachievable. Inevitably this leads to disappointment. Everyone I know would like to change the look of some body part, and that includes me! Unfortunately many people abuse their bodies through months or even years of poor diets, often without realizing it. They follow the latest fad diet, taken in by false promises and expectations. Even though some of these diets result in drastic weight loss in a relatively short period of time, they can be very dangerous. As soon as you finish the diet, you start to regain the weight you lost, and often lots more besides.

Regaining weight has a very negative effect on your satisfaction with your appearance, your self-esteem and your confidence. It usually occurs because you were not on a well-balanced diet, and your body wasn't getting the amount of food it needed to stay healthy while you were on the plan. Or it may occur because you didn't prepare yourself for coping with high-risk situations. We all need to learn how to cope with temptation, and although this aspect of weight loss is often neglected, it is crucial to your long-term success. (See Chapter 3.)

In this book one of the most important things you will learn is how to set realistic goals. You will lose fat if you follow the guidelines set out in this book, but there will be no overnight change in how you look. Just as it takes a long time to become overweight, it can take a long time to lose weight safely, so that it stays off for good.

So what are you expecting as you start to read this book? If you are hoping for an instant, 28-day miracle, you will be disappointed. My hope for you is that as you read you will learn to make changes in your life, in what you eat and in your activity levels, and that you will drastically improve your health. This has to be first and foremost. The wonderful thing about this book is that in addition to becoming healthier, you will also lose excess fat from your body. (That is, provided you actually follow the guidelines in this book it's not enough just to read it!)

As you read you will learn that by reeducating yourself you can become healthier and slimmer at the same time. The majority of dieters feel anything from mild apprehension to dread at the thought of going on another diet. How do you feel as you are reading this? You can rest assured that this book *really* is different. I'm not trying to sell you some miracle food or potion that will solve all your problems. I have looked at weight loss from every angle, not just at what you put in your mouth a successful weight-loss program has to offer much more than that. I will tell you how and why you gain fat, why your body naturally changes shape as you get older, exactly what your nutritional requirements are and why many diets simply can't work. I will explain why exercise is so important and how to choose the best forms of exercise for you. We will also look at the psychology of dieting (Why do we do it?), what you can realistically expect to achieve and, most important of all, how you can achieve it.

Health professionals are well aware that in order to achieve long-term weight loss, long-term changes in behavior must take place. This means changing eating habits, as well as including in your life some kind of exercise regimen, however gentle. As a profession we are all united on this issue there is no debate. We know it is the truth. In spite of this, some unscrupulous companies, more interested in their bank balances than in our health, spend millions of dollars each year trying to convince us that the next "quick fix" is just around the corner, that their latest discovery really is the one that will rid us of those unwanted inches in record time.

This kind of marketing is very cruel.

The truth is, none of the quick-fix diets, including meal-replacement drinks and many other pills and potions, will work in the long term. (See Chapter 2 to find out why.) As soon as you return to your original way of eating, you repeat the process that made you overweight in the first place. In the meantime your body has become so bewildered that it is convinced it is going to be starved, and it learns to store fat more efficiently in order to conserve fuel.

Consumers are very vulnerable to advertisements and clever marketing strategies, and there is a desperate need to educate people so that they are not taken in by false claims.

I have written this book in order to dispel the myths. It just may be one of the most important books you will ever read, and I would encourage you to read all of it, from cover to cover. You will also find it very valuable to dip into from time to time, to remind yourself about certain things.

I wish you success. My goal is to help you achieve *your* goal, whatever that may be. Whether you want to lose sixty pounds or three pounds, this book will help you to achieve your goal. It will also help you to become fitter and healthier and allow you to get more out of life. That has to be good!

Chapter 1

Nutrition: The Bare Necessities

The Nutrients You Need and How to Get Them

How much do you really know about nutrition? My guess is that you probably already know that what you eat isn't ideal. Does this sound familiar?

My diet is horrendous; I just don't have the time to eat properly. I often skip breakfast; there's too much of a rush. I have a light lunch, sometimes a bag of potato chips and a sandwich or just a piece of fruit. I have several cups of tea or coffee during the day, sometimes with a cookie, and my largest meal in the evening, which leaves me feeling full and bloated. I know I should make more of an effort, but I just can't.

How often have you felt a sense of frustration, or even failure, because you know you're not doing the best for your body? It's no wonder we turn to the quick-fix diets that promise magical results in short periods of time, only to find out that they don't work. In fact, we often end up in worse shape than before we started.

In this chapter I will outline the basic food groups: what they are and why we need them; how much we need to stay healthy; and how the energy nutrients are broken down to provide us with fuel. I will also give you tips to help you put all this into practice.

Why do we need nutritious food? The answer is quite simple to provide our bodies with everything needed to function well, to give us the energy we need to go about daily life and to help prevent illness. It's not enough just to fill our bodies with bulk to get rid of hunger pangs; we need a balance of nutrients in order to achieve optimum health.

I believe the key to changing eating (and exercise) habits is learning to understand the body's needs. How often do we accept a new pill or powder just because the label says it's full of nourishment? If we can understand what our bodies need, how much is needed and why, it becomes much easier to see where we're going wrong and to do something about it.

So what is a diet? Going on a diet doesn't necessarily mean you are reducing the amount you eat in order to lose weight. Everyone is on a diet; it simply means what you eat. You shouldn't think of the recommendations in this book as something you should do, or as a diet you should go on, but, as I explained in the introduction, as reasons and ways to change permanently. After all, if you can go on a diet, then you can also come off of it, and then you are back to square one.

Let's find out how much you do know about nutrition. With all the clever marketing that major food companies engage in, it is difficult to tell fact from fiction. Test your knowledge with these questions and see how you do:

1. Only fat, carbohydrates and protein give us energy. true/false
2. Protein can be stored as fat. true/false
3. Alcohol can be used to provide muscular energy. true/false
4. Carbohydrates provide us with twice as many calories per gram as fat. true/false
5. You have to eat meat to get adequate supplies of protein. true/false
6. Protein is essential for hormone production. true/false
7. There are approximately 21 essential amino acids (proteins). true/false
8. A deficiency of even one of these amino acids can impair growth. true/false
9. Potatoes contain protein. true/false

10. A high-protein diet is potentially very dangerous. true/false
11. Meat is a good source of zinc and vitamin B12. true/false
12. Fat vitamins are soluble in water. true/false
13. Essential fatty acids may reduce your risk of heart disease. true/false
14. Hydrogenated fats, found in margarine, contain trans fatty acids, which act in ways similar to saturated fats. true/false
15. Cholesterol is a fatty substance found in animal fat. true/false
16. The body can produce cholesterol whether or not you take it in through food. true/false
17. Carbohydrates should make up the largest portion of the diet. true/false
18. In order to burn fat, you must eat carbohydrates. true/false
19. Dietary fiber cannot be broken down by the body. true/false
20. A diet too high in fiber takes out essential vitamins and minerals. true/false
21. Minerals are essential for blood clotting. true/false
22. Vitamins can be manufactured by the body. true/false

Here are the answers. Have a look and see how you did. The correct answer is in boldface:

1. Only fat, carbohydrates and protein give us energy. true/false
2. Protein can be stored as fat. true/false
3. Alcohol can be used to provide muscular energy. true/false
4. Carbohydrates provide us with twice as many calories per gram as fat. true/false
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How did you do? If you got some of them wrong, you will learn a lot of valuable information in this chapter that will help you to achieve your goal.

The Essential Nutrients

The foods or nutrients we eat can be broken down into six groups:

carbohydrates

fat

protein

vitamins

minerals

water

The first three are our energy nutrients; in other words, they contain the fuel our bodies need to be able to function effectively. We burn calories, not only when we exercise but all the time, in order for our bodies to function and stay healthy. A calorie is simply a way of measuring the amount of energy we are using. One calorie represents the amount of heat energy it takes to raise the temperature of 1 gram of water by 1°C. A kilocalorie represents 1,000 calories. This is often written as Calorie, which means the same thing. All the calories from food come from carbohydrates, fat and protein, and this is why they are called the energy nutrients.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates come essentially from plants; in other words, they are foods that are grown. They can be classified as foods that "have not been born." For example, pasta, rice, potatoes, vegetables and breads are all carbohydrates, and none of them has a mother. Plants capture the energy in sunlight and use it to produce glucose. When we eat plants, we are eating valuable sources of glucose, which our bodies can then break down and use as energy. Carbohydrates can be classified into two groups: simple sugars and complex carbohydrates. On their own, simple sugars such as glucose, fructose, lactose and sucrose are empty calories. They have no significant nutritional value whatsoever; they just make things taste sweet. Unfortunately sugar is added to many foods during processing you only need to look at the food labels on everyday items such as baked beans to find examples. More obvious food sources include:

candy

sugar

honey

Complex carbohydrates are plant foods that contain stores of starch. They are more complex in their makeup, which consists of a combination of vitamins, minerals and fiber. Unlike simple sugars, they have a very high nutritional value and should make up the largest portion of our diet. Good sources include:

fruit

vegetables

grains

Many people have misconceptions about the amount of carbohydrates they should eat if they are on weight-reducing diets. Carbohydrates are not fattening fat is fattening! It is the fat (butter and oil, for example) that you put on the bread and potatoes that makes them fattening and not the carbohydrates themselves. However, if the total number of calories you consume in one day is higher than the number you burn, then you will gain weight as your body stores the excess as fat.

Recent research suggests that a diet high in carbohydrates and low in fat reduces the risk of developing some forms of cancer. This is because carbohydrates contain valuable nutrients that act as antioxidants. These antioxidants can deactivate harmful chemicals in the body, particularly if the carbohydrates are eaten fresh and raw. These harmful chemicals, known as free radicals, attack and injure vital cell structures. If you eat plenty of raw vegetables and some nuts and whole grains such as wheat, you will be getting an excellent supply of natural antioxidants. Good vegetable sources include:

spinach

watercress

asparagus

broccoli

green peppers

brussels sprouts

cauliflower

red cabbage

Fruit sources of antioxidants include:

peaches

apricots

oranges

bananas

apples

strawberries

Antioxidants can help protect the body against many degenerative diseases, including heart disease.

Remember: Carbohydrates are a good source of fuel. They also provide valuable vitamins and minerals. If they are eaten in moderation, they will not make you fat. However, don't forget that too much of anything will be converted to and stored as body fat.

Fat

Fat is an excellent source of energy and performs many essential functions within the body. Certain vitamins can only be obtained from fat, and these are crucial for maintaining the nutritional balance we need. Fat holds your internal organs in place, makes up a large percentage of your brain and helps to connect your skin to your frame. It is, therefore, certainly not advisable to go on a fat-free diet.

You may have heard the term essential fatty acids (EFAs). These are simply fats that are essential for the body to maintain optimum health. Our bodies cannot manufacture these types of fat, so we must include them in our diets. The two EFAs are called omega-3 (alpha linolenic), which is found in oily fish, and omega-6 (cis linoleic), which is found in vegetable oils. Another fatty acid called arachidonic acid is semiessential. The body can make it, provided it has an adequate supply of other nutrients.

EFAs are vital for the health of your heart and circulatory system, as well as many other bodily functions. Not getting enough EFAs can lead to a deterioration in health and, ultimately, to death. (Deficiency symptoms are listed later.) EFAs are found in safflower, sunflower, corn, sesame, pumpkin and linseed oils. Other good food sources include green vegetables, tofu, fish (for example, salmon, mackerel, rainbow trout and sardines) and fish oils. Although all whole, fresh, unprocessed foods contain some EFAs, these EFAs go through many changes in the body, as the body has to break down and refine them into substances it can use. Many of us take in enough EFAs through the diet, but unfortunately, we also take in other foods that block the breakdown of the EFAs and prevent them from doing their valuable work. These foods include saturated fat, cholesterol, large amounts of alcohol and high levels of sugar. We should, therefore, not only think about how much fat we need but also look at the quality of the fat we are taking in. If you consider that every single cell in your body contains fat to support its membrane, you can see why the right quality is so important. If we don't take in enough of the good-quality fats, we can't use them to make our cells. Would you really like to be made from second-class materials?

If you're not getting enough EFAs, symptoms can include:

eczema or dry skin

hair loss

liver or kidney degeneration

excessive water loss

susceptibility to infections

failure to heal

inflammatory conditions such as arthritis

heart and circulatory problems

deterioration of vision

breakdown of nerve impulses within the muscles

loss of motor skills (the ability to control muscular actions)

And so the list goes on. With many other major and minor conditions now being linked to a lack of EFAs, it is vital that we take in sufficient quantities through our diets and avoid foods that stop the body from utilizing these precious nutrients.

Having established the importance of EFAs, it is worth considering that most of us still eat far more dietary fat than we need and eat fat of poor quality; in other words, we eat too much of the bad stuff and not enough of the good stuff! We store this surplus as fat on our bodies. A high intake of the wrong kinds of fat drastically increases the likelihood of heart disease, heart attacks and many other serious illnesses.

The fat we eat is broken down into fatty acids, which will either be used to produce energy or be placed into storage in the fat cells. This stored fat is called adipose tissue. It is also sometimes called cellulite. The only time that fat comes out of fat cells is when it is burned as fuel. Fat will not be broken down by any cream or potion; it is a fuel, and any excess has to be burned.

The fat cell is constantly active, with fat going in and coming out all the time. If you maintain a balance between what you burn and what you consume, you won't get fatter. If the balance is tipped the wrong way, however, and you eat more than you burn, the fat cells will increase in size. (See Chapter 4 for facts about fat.)

Fat is either saturated (solid at room temperature) or unsaturated (liquid at room temperature). Most saturated fats are of animal origin (exceptions include palm and coconut oils) and contain high levels of cholesterol, which is another fatty substance present in animal fat. Cholesterol can clog up arteries and restrict blood flow if consumed in excess.

There are two types of cholesterol: good cholesterol (high-density lipoprotein, or HDL) and bad cholesterol (low-density lipoprotein, or LDL). It is the ratio between the two that is important. LDL carries cholesterol through the body and deposits excess amounts in the blood vessels. HDL mops up this excess and carries it back to the liver, where it can be broken down and excreted by the body (fiber helps this process). If the level of LDL is much higher than the level of HDL, then more and more cholesterol gets deposited in the blood vessels, which may ultimately lead to a blockage. Although every cell in the body has a need for cholesterol, the body is able to manufacture all it needs, provided its owner is eating a nutritionally balanced diet.

It is saturated fat that has been associated with heart disease. To restrict your intake of

both saturated fat and cholesterol, reduce the amount of meat you eat and always choose lean cuts. Despite popular belief, beef is not exceptionally high in cholesterol and, in this respect, can be compared equally with chicken or fish. However, the total saturated fat content of beef is relatively high, so it should be eaten in moderation.

Unsaturated fats are considered to be healthier than saturated fats. In fact, one particular unsaturated fat, olive oil, seems to be health-protective. A sprinkling of this oil on a salad or when cooking a stir-fry is a good way to get the essential vitamins provided by fat without the associated problems of saturated fats.

Fish in particular, oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, tuna and sardines is another good source of high-quality fat. The oils found in these fish can help prevent heart disease, since they block many harmful reactions that can cause blood to clot easily. The way you prepare your fish is also very important; don't fry it in butter or cover it in a creamy sauce. If you don't like fish, you may be tempted by the range of fish oil capsules currently on the market. Some of the higher quality brands, available in many health-food stores, are well worth taking. Always read the label and ask for advice before you buy. Assistants in health-food stores are usually knowledgeable about the best kind of supplements. When you actually look at the amount of nutrients you are getting for your money, the more expensive brands often end up cheaper in the long run. More of the nutrients they contain can be absorbed by the body than can the nutrients in some of the cheaper alternatives.

It is worth remembering that fat is often hidden behind other names in menus and recipes. For example, cream is essentially fat, but somehow *fat of chicken soup* or *ice fat* doesn't sound quite so appetizing, does it? In reality, however, that is exactly what you would be eating. Just ask yourself, "Do I want to wear this chocolate bar more than I want to eat it?"

Remember: Some fat is essential, so select high-quality oils and keep to a minimum the amount of saturated fat you eat. The menus in this book have been carefully planned to give you the right balance of EFAs, while minimizing the amount of saturated fat.

Protein

Proteins are often referred to as the building blocks of the body. This is because our muscles are made up of tiny strands of protein called amino acids, which give the body its basic shape and support. Since we are constantly breaking down these strands, they have to be continually replaced. Protein's other vital roles include maintaining healthy skin, hair and nails; producing hormones; aiding in sexual development; and sustaining healthy levels of red blood cells (which carry oxygen through the body). Although it is the second most plentiful substance in the body after water it is also the one energy nutrient we need the least of. As with fat, it's the quality of the protein we eat that determines our health. Provided we eat enough calories per day to satisfy our individual requirements, we will usually take in more than we actually need, so don't worry about the quantity.

Protein is broken down in the body into many different amino acids. The body is able to manufacture some of these itself, but there are eight essential amino acids that cannot be manufactured. A deficiency of even one of these eight can lead to problems with the production of protein structures.

Foods that are rich in protein do not always contain all the essential amino acids. If the food does contain all eight, it is termed complete; foods that are low in one or more are termed incomplete. Most meats and dairy products are complete protein foods, while most vegetables and fruits are incomplete. Ideally we should eat a mixture of animal and vegetable sources to ensure that we are getting the full complement. It is possible to get all the required amino acids from fruits and vegetables, but foods must be carefully selected. Vegetarians should take care to include beans or peas in at least two of their meals each day.

They should also combine incomplete proteins such as grains (cereals, pasta and breads) with milk or milk products (such as cheese and yogurt). Grains can be combined with legumes to achieve the same effect, and seeds can also be a good source of protein if combined with legumes. The proteins that can be obtained from vegetable sources are not as easily absorbed as those from meat sources. Vitamin C can aid this process, so vegetarians should always eat or drink foods rich in this vitamin with their meals. Good sources of vitamin C include oranges and orange juice.

Animal sources of protein include:

meat

meat products (such as pâté)

fish

fish products (such as paste)

shellfish

cheese (although you should watch the fat content)

yogurt

eggs

milk

Vegetable sources of protein include:

beans

peas (including chickpeas)

butter beans

textured vegetable protein (TVP), often used as a filler in commercial products

tofu and other soy products

nuts and nut products

bread

potatoes

cereals

rice

pasta (preferably a whole-wheat variety)

The body takes what protein it needs from these foods and breaks it down into amino acids, which it can then use. It is unable to store the rest as protein. (If you think about it, we don't have spare muscles tucked away, do we?) However, any leftover protein is stored as fat, along with everything else we consume in excess. (For information about the dangers of high-protein diets, see page 30.)

The Energy Nutrients Picking the Right Combinations

A combination of all three energy nutrients is essential to maintain optimum health and to provide us with all the energy we need for everyday life. What we need most are carbohydrates, which should make up approximately 60 to 65 percent of the diet; next is fat, which should make up 25 to 30 percent maximum; and finally, protein, which should make up the remaining percentage.

If you think of your favorite meal (roast beef, gravy, roasted potatoes and vegetables, or lamb chops with peas and carrots, for example), you probably list the protein element first and foremost and plan your meal around that. Yet when you look at your plate, foods from the carbohydrate group—vegetables and rice, for example—should take up most of the room. The smallest portion should be from high-protein foods such as meat and fish. If this is what you see, then it is likely that you are achieving the correct balance between carbohydrates, fat and protein—well done! If most of the space on your plate is taken up by meat or fish, you definitely need to make some changes.

People rarely achieve the correct balance. Protein often makes up at least half of the meal. Because many protein sources such as meat and cheese are high in fat (often saturated), the balance is tipped the wrong way, and the majority of the meal is then made up of fat calories. This not only increases the size of your fat cells but also increases your risk of heart disease.

Food and Fiber

Dietary fiber comes from plant foods and is the only component of food that cannot be broken down by the intestines. This means that it comes out the same as it goes in. Fiber keeps the intestines mobile, which is very important. Some research has indicated that this may be cancer-preventive. By eating more fiber, you can also decrease your cholesterol level, which helps reduce the risk of heart disease. Good sources of fiber include:

fruit

vegetables

legumes

whole grains

Processed food loses much of its fiber content, often because the skin is removed from fruit and whole-wheat flour is milled into white flour. The brown varieties of bread and rice generally contain more fiber than their white counterparts.

If you are eating a wide variety of carbohydrates, you will automatically be getting enough fiber. Diets that are too high in fiber can be harmful, though, since food passes through the intestines before the digestive system has had time to extract all the nutrients. High-fiber diets require an increase in the amount of water consumed, since water will be absorbed into the fiber. If you do eat lots of fiber and don't drink enough water, you may develop stomach cramps.

Vitamins

Vitamins are manufactured by plants, including fruits, vegetables and other foods from the carbohydrate group. The word "vitamin" comes from the Latin *vita*, for "life," and vitamins are indeed essential for life. They play an important role in the formation of red blood cells, bone building and many other functions of the body.

Vitamins are fat soluble or water soluble. Fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K are absorbed along with fat. The body usually has a store of these vitamins, and an excess can lead to the body becoming poisoned by them. Water-soluble vitamins B complex and C are more easily excreted by the body, via urine. Taking extreme quantities, however, can lead to dangerous side effects such as permanent liver damage.

Vitamin supplementation is big business these days. Powerful marketing strategies are used to sell us various combinations of pills and capsules, and many people have become convinced that in order to stay healthy they must supplement their food intake. In some cases, supplements are used instead of meals. I recently asked a friend of mine who regularly complains of a lack of energy what he'd had for breakfast. "I've had a multivitamin tablet and I'm full," he replied. There is a great danger here. No doubt about it vitamin supplements can be very beneficial in cases of deficiency. When they are misused, however, they can cause more problems than they solve.

In an ideal world, there would be a plentiful supply of vitamins in the foods we eat. If you eat a wide variety of foods, you *should* automatically get all the nutrients you require. Much of our food is overprocessed, however, and so has lost a lot of its nutritional value before it reaches our saucers. It then loses even more value during the cooking process, which means that there is very little left by the time we actually eat it. To minimize this loss, buy fresh produce whenever possible. Although it may be more expensive, you do get a lot more real food for your money.

If you decide that you do need to supplement, I recommend that you seek advice from a qualified nutritionist or dietitian before you buy. The way in which the body absorbs vitamins is very finely tuned; it requires a certain amount of each one. If one particular vitamin is taken in excess, the whole balance may be disrupted, and the body's ability to absorb other vitamins may be impaired. Vegetarians are one group that does need to supplement because those who do not eat meat do not get the valuable B12 vitamin, which has many vital functions in the body. A deficiency of B12 can lead to anemia,