

9 THINGS TO LOOK FOR IN A QUALITY WEIGHT LOSS PROGRAM

Consumers spend billions of dollars each year on weight loss programs and products, and yet obesity rates continue to increase. With the huge variety of weight loss programs available, how can you choose the right one that will help you lose weight safely and keep it off for good? To make it easier, we've put together a list of key program elements to look for:

- 1. Safety.** A sound weight-loss program will encourage you to check with your health-care provider before you get started. This visit allows your provider a chance to offer any special precautions or guidelines based on your health status and should include a screening to assess your readiness for exercise.
- 2. Credibility.** For best results, the program should have credentialed providers such as registered dietitians, certified fitness professionals, certified wellness coaches, behavioral health specialists (licensed psychologists or counselors) and such licensed medical professionals as physicians and registered nurses. Use caution with peer-led programs. That is people who claim they have lost weight successfully. These programs can offer support and guide you through the program functions, but often don't have a staff with an educational background in exercise, nutrition, or behavior change to offer professional advice.
- 3. Flexibility.** Programs that demand adherence to a rigid diet or exercise plan set you up for failure. Look instead for programs that integrate your food and physical activity preferences. For long-term success, you'll need to adopt lifestyle changes you can live with.
- 4. Realistic outcomes.** "Lose 20 pounds in 1 week" may catch your eye, but the truth is that permanent weight loss happens slowly. Most experts recommend a weight loss rate of ½ pound up to a maximum 2 pounds per week for lasting results. Ask to see program outcomes data regarding average amount of weight lost and long-term follow-up results. If no data is available, or they won't share it, consider it a red flag.
- 5. Self-monitoring.** One study found that people who kept a daily food log lost twice as much weight as those who didn't. Writing down what you're eating keeps you accountable and makes you think twice about going back for seconds. Keeping an exercise record can be extremely



motivating as you review your progress and see how far you've come. And regular weighing, whether daily or weekly, has been linked to greater amounts of moderate weight loss and less weight regain. Self-monitoring offers an objective look at how you're doing in relation to your goals and that's extremely helpful, especially when you hit a plateau and need to adjust your approach.

- 6. Sensible nutrition.** Avoid programs that eliminate entire food categories, such as fruit, grains, or fats. According to the American Dietetic Association, all foods fit in a healthy diet. Plans that advocate special combinations of foods, certain foods in unlimited quantities, or are too restrictive, don't work. Eat a variety of whole grains, colorful vegetables and fruits, low-fat dairy products and lean sources of protein and you're on your path to a healthier diet.
- 7. Regular exercise.** Getting active and staying active is the cornerstone to maintaining a healthy body weight. Exercise optimizes conditions in the brain for enhanced learning and decision-making. That's extra brainpower to help you adopt healthier habits and to keep

you on track. It's also a great mood-elevator, boosts metabolism and can help counteract emotional eating. A weight loss program should encourage you to find ways to make physical activity a part of your everyday life.

- 8. Cognitive changes.** Learning to think in new ways is essential for long-term success. A reputable program will help you replace faulty thinking patterns with positive, productive ways of thinking that support your health goals. Example: Replace "I'll never lose weight" with "I'm learning how to better manage obstacles to healthy eating, and I'm making better choices every day."
- 9. Believable claims and no pressure.** Walk away from any program that pressures you to buy special foods, supplements, pills, or gadgets or promises a quick fix. There are no magic pills to "melt your fat away." Sustainable weight loss requires a significant effort and a sensible approach, and with the right support, expertise, and guidance, you can make it happen.

Additional Resources

- [Choosing a Safe and Successful Weight Loss Program](#) – Weight-control Information Network
- [Weight Loss: Finding a Weight Loss Program that Works for You](#) — Federal Trade Commission
- [Choosing a Weight Loss Program](#) — WebMD



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