

Of Local Interest

Time to get serious about weight

By **PETER DeWOLF**

Staff Writer

It seems to be almost a craze these days, the Atkins Diet, Weight Watchers, exercise gyms, dietary supplements and even Dr Phil's Ultimate Weight Loss Program.

Which of these actually work, and more importantly, which are healthy and will allow someone to keep the weight off?

That is the million - make that billion - dollar question.

The fact is, there is no magic bullet.

There is no way of reducing carbs or drinking a particular beverage that will make you effortlessly lose weight and keep it off.

Unless you are willing to saturate your body with amphetamines, known on the street as speed or crank, you are not going to lose weight unless you make a few lifestyle changes. Even if you do lose some, it will not stay off.

Those adjustments may include dietary changes, but most importantly they will include a level of exer-

cise.

Now, before everyone gets pictures of five-mile per day runs, and lifting a hundred pounds of weights, understand that such levels of exercise may in fact be counter-productive.

Over the past few decades, an Ottawa University professor conducted research to find out exactly what made the difference between athletes who stayed in top form, and the others who struggled harder to stay in shape. What exactly were they doing differently?

Dr. Al Reed, who is a Professor of Kinesiology (the study of the human body and exercise) in the Health Sciences Department at Ottawa University, used the research to develop the PEAK program.

It uses pure science, to determine the exact level and types of exercise for each person, so they get maximum results for the least amount of effort.

"You need to have objective information," said Kevin Wilson, who operates the PEAK Performance Centre in Ottawa.

"Numbers make sense."

The Centre is one of only six labs in the country that test for the PEAK system, and most of those labs are university and research based.

The PEAK program, using the data and research from Reed's studies, developed systems and models to meet specific goals like endurance, speed, flexibility and strength.

While the PEAK models were originally developed with high performance ath-

letes in mind, a number of very interesting facts about weight and general physical fitness were also discovered.

Now, while 15 percent of the people using the PEAK models are elite athletes, 85 percent are simply people who want to lose weight and improve their general fitness.

However, the basic principles remain the same for both groups - getting the maximum result for the least amount of time and

energy.

Losing the pounds and staying fit

The PEAK 7X program is the one generally used for weight loss, and it requires a relatively low level of exercise.

According to Wilson, the biggest mistake people make when trying to get fit, is they think they need to hurt in order to lose weight. He also said that the charts used for fitness equipment are far too general and only

really apply to about three percent of people. The program actually severely restricts the amount of heavy exercise the person should do, requiring them to stay in Zone 1 - a low intensity exercise level. The Ottawa Senators actually use PEAK 7X for recovery after a hard game. It burns off lactate their muscles accumulate after the high-energy exercise at centre ice in the Corel Centre.

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Reporter Peter DeWolf is getting a first-hand look at the PEAK weight loss program, participating in his personal fitness challenge. Above, he works out at the Arnprior Health and Fitness Club in the Kenwood Business Centre in Arnprior. Already down 40 pounds, he wants to lose 50 more in the next year.

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Putting the PEAK weight loss system to the test

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The Canadian National Ski Team, along with the national badminton, squash and curling teams all use this scientific process to stay at their peak.

Other PEAK users include the Canadian Cycling Association and Biathlon Canada.

The science

Most people assume the larger their caloric intake, the more weight they will gain. Therefore to lose weight, your calorie intake must drop. This is not always true according to Wilson.

If you starve your body of calories, it will quickly learn to conserve energy, and the most efficient way to do this is to accumulate fat reserves.

So while there may be an immediate loss of weight, it will not last, and it will become harder and harder to lose additional pounds after the initial success.

"Just dieting is not sustainable in the long term," said Wilson. "It is a band aid on the cut and is not curing the problem."

For every gram of carbs in a person's body, there are four grams of water. Wilson claims to be able to get anyone to lose 10 pounds in the first 14 days, using a diet only, but that will be an initial water loss, not sustainable down the road. A low carb level will mean blood sugar levels drop and hunger sets in, making it even harder to maintain the diet.

"The problem is not that they are eating carbs, it is something else," he explained. "It is the quantity, the type of carbs but most of all a lack of proper fat-burning exercise."

The key to the PEAK 7X program is "fat-burning exercise."

Much of the exercise people tend to do is not "fat-burning" exercise, and in fact they are often working at cross-purposes to their goals. The harder they exercise, the less results they see. There is a scientific reason for this anomaly.

The body has two basic muscles groups. One is called "fast twitch", the second are "slow twitch." The fast twitch are used for

high intensity exercise and use carbs to power themselves.

The muscles produce a waste substance called lactate, which either must be used or is stored as fat.

On the other hand, slow twitch muscles are used for low intensity, endurance exercise. They need - you guessed it - lactate, to power them. When lactate is unavailable, they immediately switch to fat reserves and burn them instead. That is why top athletes do low intensity exercise after competition. It is to burn off the excess lactate in their blood, before it is converted to fat.

So, if someone tries to exercise harder to lose weight, they simply begin to burn carbs and produce lactate, not only stopping any fat burning they may be accomplishing, but also making them hungry for carbs.

What is needed to lose weight, is strictly low intensity exercise, using slow twitch muscle groups only, and producing as little lactate as possible.

Eventually, as the body adjusts to the low intensity, duration exercise; the amount of exercise an individual can do without producing lactate will increase, further enhancing their fat-burning capability. For the average person, the PEAK program works in the opposite way to traditional exercise and diet systems.

Most other systems will show a dramatic initial loss, leveling out quite quickly.

PEAK 7X will show less of an immediate result, as the body is retrained to burn fat. However the results tend to increase over time, as more and more fat is burned, while eating habits remain relatively constant.

All PEAK participants are monitored and their exercise regime adjusted to reflect the levels of lactate in their blood at different levels of exercise. If lactate levels are too high, then the intensity is reduced to bring them back into Zone 1.

Blood tests, as well as full weight and measurements are taken about four times a year, to scientifically monitor progress.

While each person is different, the average person should expect to see between a 5 and 15 pound

average loss each month, depending on the number of days they can devote to the 60 to 90 minute regime.

With the program, Wilson thinks that people are getting it right.

There is no cheating on food intake, no pills to take. It is all about the right amount of intensity based on the irrefutable numbers.

"It is not an easy fix," he admitted. However, it is scientifically sound and it does work, no exceptions. It is all based on the numbers.

Testing the system

For those of you who have followed the tales of the Incredible Shrinking Shirt and my efforts at weight loss over the last two years, you will know that I too have suffered from the middle-aged spread.

During the past 18 months, through a modest reduction in my diet - eating two pizzas a week instead of four - and mild exercise like strolls up and down my country lane once a week, I have been able to lose about 40 pounds and a couple of inches around the waist.

If anyone should have a hard time losing weight, it is I. Once a well-toned 155-pound (6 feet) virile male specimen, I slowly morphed into 360-pound portly gentleman, on good wholesome Valley fare.

A very demanding schedule, where 18-hour days are not unusual, and a calendar of appointments often compressed into 15-minute increments, means I don't have a lot of spare time to devote to special programs.

Sitting behind a desk or at council, committee and court sessions for endless hours does nothing to improve my physical fitness. The rest of the time is spent driving from assignment to assignment. In between are luncheon and dinner meetings with officials or other sources. Often one does not eat healthy foods because it tends to be quick junk food to save time.

While not very physically demanding, the job of a journalist is very demanding mentally and emotionally, so one arrives home at the end of the day just as exhausted as someone who does physical work all day. The temptation is to just sit and veg. So, having reached a plateau on my quest for physical fitness, I started to look around.

The PEAK program is conducted locally by Doug Cavanaugh at Arnprior Health and Fitness Club at the Kenwood Business Centre. He and the people from the PEAK Centre agreed to put me through the program.

I have been tested, poked, and prodded, and given an initial set of exercises which take up three days a week, for just about an hour each of those days.

Over the next 12 months or so, I want to lose about 50 more pounds and several inches, gaining a better overall physical tone, which will allow me to sustain the weight loss.

For the coming year, I invite you to join me as I take this journey and provide regular updates on how and what I am doing to reach those goals.

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