

Malamalama aga ole Kanesa: Five strategies for losing the fat permanently Sunday May 16, 2010

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Many American Samoans are taking recent reports about our community's high rate of obesity and resulting diabetes and heart disease seriously.

This is evidenced by the increase number of walkers at the OMV, the increase in physical activity at Lion's Park playgrounds, the success of the 'Biggest Loser' program and development of initiatives like 'Fit 4 Life'.

By taking action our community has demonstrated that we can improve our health status without fancy equipment, a huge federal grant or more government agencies. If each individual takes responsibility for his or her own health and makes the necessary lifestyle changes to improve health we can reverse the current trend towards high death rates from chronic diseases and increased risk for various types of cancer.

The Encarta World English Dictionary defines health as "the general condition of the body or mind, especially in terms of the presence or absence of illnesses, injuries, or impairments." The World Health Organization defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". How do you define 'health'?

Do you consider yourself a healthy person by your own definition?

According to current research and published statistics, approximately 94% of the American Samoans reading this article are considered overweight or obese.

If you feel you are in good health have you considered your weight? Have you considered how much exercise you get each day? Have you counted how many times you eat fruits and vegetables each day? Even if you have never been diagnosed with diabetes, heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure or other illness you may still be 'un-healthy' because your body is not operating at its best.

This means that even skinny people could be un-healthy. Sometimes, because 'skinny' people have a faster metabolism (their bodies burn calories quickly), they appear to be healthy but if they're not exercising or eating the right foods they can be just as un-healthy as the overweight person.

The following are five strategies to become healthy— for a lifetime. That means losing the fat forever and making your body operate at its best every day. No more fad diets, no more one-month crash workouts, and no more sitting on the couch.

These five steps must be done together to result in a 'lifestyle' change that you can maintain without feeling deprived, pressured, or set up for failure.

1. CHANGE THE WAY YOU LOOK AT WEIGHT

Weight is just one part of health. It reflects what we put into our bodies and what we do with our bodies. Stop looking at weight as the thing you're trying to change.

Losing weight is not the goal— it is simply one of the beneficial results of eating healthy and exercising. Before fast foods, cars, and large grocery stores, Samoans lived off the land which meant eating the foods that they planted and harvested. Farming was the exercise, as was fishing and hunting— and walking instead of driving.

It is unreasonable to think that in this modern age we could all go back to living this type of traditional lifestyle every day, but, we can improve our modern day schedules to include traditional foods and physical activity. Losing fat permanently will only be achieved with lifestyle changes that include good habits and nutritional eating for a lifetime.

2. EAT FEWER CALORIES

You must eat fewer calories than you need to maintain your current weight AND increase the amount of activity you do to burn calories.

Start by cutting out 300 to 500 calories per day. By cutting out 500 calories per day, and exercising at least 30 minutes per day, you should burn 3500 calories in seven days which is equal to one pound of fat.

Unfortunately, you will not know immediately if the 3500 calories you burn is all fat, or if it includes water weight, muscle, or body waste. However, consistency is the key.

Over time, as your body gets used to eating fewer calories it will draw on your energy reserves, including fat, to stay alive. Those 500 calories could come from drinking two less sodas per day, or eating toast and fruit instead of rice and bacon for breakfast, or avoiding fast food everyday! You can also stop eating when you're not hungry, cut out the snacks, and stop eating after 7:00 p.m. Taking up these habits will help you maintain your new lifestyle.

3. USE EXERCISE TO BURN THE FAT

Aerobic activity or 'cardio' burns the maximum amount of calories. To burn fat the body needs oxygen. Continuous cardio activity, for example a 30-minute jog, ensures that your body is filling up with oxygen during exercise which tells the body to start converting fat into energy. Exercising also calibrates your internal organs, burns toxins in your body, improves blood flow and mental health.

The combination of cutting 500 calories per day and exercising will ensure weight loss over time at a safe rate. Again, the goal is not to lose weight. Weight loss is simply a by-product of the lifestyle changes you make to become healthier!

4. BUILD MUSCLE

You don't want to be a skinny-mini. You want to be fit and healthy! Muscle is an active tissue— you use it to move your body, not just lift barbells in the gym. Building muscle tissue ensures that more of your body is burning calories throughout the day, even when you're not officially 'exercising'.

Weight training also helps to firm your muscles so that you have more strength and stamina to exercise! You don't need a gym membership or weight set to build muscles:

Simply fill water bottles: 1 liter bottle = 2.19 pounds, 1 gallon bottle = approximately 8 pounds.

Do sit-ups and crunches, push-ups, squats.

5. NEVER STARVE YOUR BODY

You should never feel like your stomach is ready to explode or feel tired after eating a meal. On the other hand, don't crash diet and stop eating or drink slim teas or take diet pills. These things do not ensure permanent good health resulting in weight loss.

They may cause temporary weight loss and possibly internal organ damage but they will never amount to much more. The typical person cannot lose more than 2 pounds per week healthfully unless under the care of a doctor or trainer.

By starving yourself your body will start eating muscle and reserving fat instead of using fat first, and you will risk losing bone density as well.

Finally, think of weight loss as the result of changing how you live your life. Lifestyle change is more permanent than a diet. It is the adoption of new habits which will become much easier to live with after 30 days of consistently practicing them.

BE NICE TO YOUR BODY— IT'S GOD'S GIFT TO YOU, AND THE ONLY ONE YOU'VE GOT.