

## NEW PERSPECTIVES

## What is the Best Diet for Our Patients?

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**M**ore than 35% of US adults are obese, which is defined as having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or more.<sup>1</sup> Almost 50% of non-Hispanic blacks, 40% of Mexican Americans, 39% of all Hispanics, and 34% of non-Hispanic whites are obese.<sup>2</sup> We are becoming more obese. Twelve states had an obesity prevalence of more than 30% in 2010, and no state in the United States met the nation's Healthy People 2010 goal of lowering obesity prevalence to 15%.<sup>3</sup>

Many patients know that they are overweight or obese and have tried to diet and exercise. In a Noom Wellness Survey sent to more than 10,000 Noomers, 21% of those answering the survey stated that getting healthy was their New Year's resolution.<sup>4</sup> However, 62% of respondents stated that they did not keep their New Year's resolution the prior year.<sup>4</sup>

The *US News and World Report* recently reported on the best diets of 2014.<sup>5</sup> They evaluated 38 eating plans using data from medical journals, government reports, and other resources, ranking the diets based on categories of ease of use, short-term weight loss (i.e. likelihood of losing significant weight during the first 12 months), long-term weight loss (i.e. likelihood of maintaining significant weight loss for two or more years), effectiveness for preventing or managing diabetes, effectiveness for preventing cardiovascular disease or reducing risk for heart patients, ease of compliance (e.g. satiety, taste, special requirements), nutritional completeness, and health risks (e.g. malnourishment, specific nutrient concerns). A panel of nationally recognized experts reviewed the

*US News and World Report* health profiles. The best diet overall was based on panelist ratings on the above criteria.

The Dash Diet was the top overall diet. It is a heart healthy diet that aims to prevent and lower high blood pressure by emphasizing fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and low-fat dairy and avoiding high-calorie and fatty sweets, red meat, and salt. It has been found to decrease blood pressure, increase HDL, and lower LDL. Short- and long-term weight loss was moderate.

The Therapeutic Lifestyle Change (TLC) diet is a low-fat diet that was created by the National Institutes of Health's National Cholesterol Education Program. It was ranked as the second best overall diet by the *US News and World Report* and allots 1,600 calories for men and 1,200 calories for women, while cutting saturated fat to less than 7% of daily caloric intake. Plant sterols and stanols and soluble fiber can be added if an LDL reduction goal is not met. The TLC provides moderate short- and long-term weight loss.

Weight Watchers, Biggest Loser diet, Jenny Craig, Raw Food diet, and Volumetrics were named the best weight-loss diets. The Biggest Loser diet is based on calorie restriction and exercise. The Raw Food diet is based on the principle that uncooked (i.e. unheated to 115 F) plant-based foods preserve natural enzymes and nutrients that help people shed unwanted pounds. Also, people tend to consume fewer calories when eating only raw food. The Raw Food diet was found to be difficult to follow and had lower grades for safety, di-

abetes health, and heart health. Volumetrics is based on the hypothesis that people eat the same volume of food every day, so if one eats more low-calorie-density foods (e.g. vegetables) than high-calorie-density foods (e.g. chips) then one will eat fewer calories and lose weight. Jenny Craig uses prepackaged meals and/or recipes that are restricted in calories and fat and have reduced portion sizes; these meals are supplemented with counseling sessions to help patients lose weight. The costs associated with Jenny Craig can be high.

What about exercise? Studies of the Hadza hunter-gatherers show that being physically active does not protect people from being overweight (especially if they eat the Western diet)<sup>6</sup> and that human metabolism does not increase to accommodate activity as much as we had thought.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, patients tend to lose less weight than expected through the "exercise effect," making what we put in our bodies very important to the balance of normal weight.

It is important for physicians to be knowledgeable about the most common diet and exercise plans that patients are trying or considering. Also, because our patients have unique individual needs and health concerns, diets should be tailored to work for each patient.

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## NEW PERSPECTIVES

continued from page 1

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