

Lose Weight Despite a Hernia

Introduction

These notes are intended to help people who wish to lose weight, but are nervous about conventional exercise regimes because of a hernia or some other abdominal weakness, or because they are simply worried that a stoma might present a problem. They are also intended for those who would find it difficult or embarrassing to go to a gym, and all the exercises are designed to be done at home, with the equipment typically available at home.

Mere dieting, unless carried to an extreme which could be injurious to health, will never enable an individual to lose a significant amount of weight, because the body interprets a calorie controlled diet as a famine, and reduces the basal metabolism accordingly to maximise the chance of survival. The route to weight loss is to reduce the calorie intake while keeping the calorie usage unchanged, or even increased.

There is just one thing that only the individual concerned can provide, and that is the commitment to stick to the programme.

Enthusiasts will find that they have plenty of opportunity to be inventive about how they arrange to do these exercises at home. Aim initially to do ten repetitions of each, and when you can do twenty, increase the load you are working with. By all means go up to thirty repetitions if you wish, but beyond that would be a waste of time - and not a lot of energy! If you can work for part of the time with a load against which you can only manage five or six repetitions, that is perfect, but also use lighter loads so that you can do more repetitions.

If you are seriously overweight, then initially the scales will be a measure of your progress, but you will find that eventually the tape measure will be a better indicator of your improved shape. The reason is that muscle is more dense than fat, and since you will be aiming to build some muscle to keep your calorie usage up, your weight could remain constant although you are still slimming. This is where the tape measure and your mirror are your best friends, and you will see that your improved muscle tone does wonders for your appearance.

Have a word with your stoma nurse or GP about exercising; print this document and show it to them if you like.

Abdominal Support

Consider whether you should be wearing some form of support for your abdomen at present. If you don't have a known weakness, the very fact that you are wanting to lose weight suggests that you may have an increased risk of a parastomal hernia, so perhaps you should ask your stoma nurse about a support, because you are going to have to be as active as reasonably possible.

Diet

You are probably aware that mere dieting will do very little to help your weight loss, unless you starve yourself into malnutrition, because the body is designed to adjust its energy requirements to help you through what it sees as a famine. Nevertheless, it may be worth obtaining dietary advice from a nutritionist to ensure that it is optimised for weight loss.

Medication

You might be helped by something like LipoBind, which reduces the amount of fat the body absorbs, but I have heard that it tends to produce messy faeces, which is probably undesirable for a colostomate. In any case, you need a certain minimum of fat to enable you to absorb the fat soluble vitamins. My own view is that simply controlling the amount of fat you eat is a more satisfactory solution, but you might care to ask your GP about this.

Exercise

It is essential to exercise to work and build muscle, because muscles which are worked hard burn calories even when they are not being used, and this helps to keep your metabolism up even though the body is trying to reduce it to face the "famine" which your diet is creating. The good news is that you don't have to work the abdominal muscles to do this, because

you would undoubtedly find it difficult, you might injure yourself, and it wouldn't do the slightest bit of good! The muscles you need to work on are the big muscles of the legs, arms, and shoulders. Before you start, download and read "Don't Hold Your Breath!", to ensure that while you are exercising you do not place undue stress on the abdominal muscles.

You don't need to go to a gym to do this: you almost certainly have all the equipment you need in your own home. The possibilities which come to mind are the following:

Step-ups

On and off the bottom tread of the stairs, holding the newel post for support if you need.

Calf Raises

Still on the bottom step, up on to your toes and then drop your heels as low as you can. Start with both feet, but when you have progressed, do it on one foot, and then the other.

Press-ups

You may find the conventional press-up difficult initially, but try standing a little way from an open doorway, put your hands one on each side of the door frame, and let your body lean into the doorway so that you have to use your arms to push you back. You can control the workload by how far from the doorway you stand, and how far you let yourself lean.

When you feel that you are ready, try the conventional press-up. You may find it too difficult initially supporting yourself between your toes and your hands: if so, try between your knees and your hands until you have developed a little more strength. Whatever you do, make sure that you are using your back muscles to keep your body straight and rigid.

Initially, place your hands on the floor just beneath your shoulders, but later on you can vary this with a wider spacing: hands under the elbows (more difficult) or hands close together (very difficult).

Biceps Curls

Find a tin of food that is as big as you can hold in one hand, and starting with your arm by your side, bend the elbow to raise the tin to your shoulder, and then lower gently. When you build up strength, you may find that you need something like an old-fashioned kettle, with an appropriate amount of water in it, to provide a load.

Arm Raises

Go back to a tin of food, probably a smaller one to start with, and this time instead of bending your elbow, keep your arm straight and raise it to a horizontal position out in front of you, then lower gently. When you have done it in front, do it to the side. Then progress to taking it right up above your head instead of stopping at the horizontal position. This is an excellent exercise to develop attractive shoulders.

Single Arm Row

Find a low bench (a stool won't be big enough, but you might be able to use the bottom stair), rest your left knee on it, then bend over and support your body with your left hand. Take a weight in your right hand (something with a handle like an old-fashioned kettle, a small bucket, with water to provide some weight, or an iron), pull it right up to your shoulder, and then lower it until your arm is straight. Repeat an appropriate number of times, and then change round so you use the other hand. This is a good way of working the large muscles of the upper back.

And Finally!

When you have been doing these exercises conscientiously and made progress with your improved shape, consider joining a gym. You will already know many of the exercises, so you won't be treated as a novice, and you will almost certainly find it easier with the right equipment. Aerobics or aqua aerobics are excellent if you enjoy them, but you can actually obtain as much cardiovascular benefit from resistance training in the gym - provided that you don't chat too much in between exercises!