

Doctors oversee weight-loss plan for Brevard residents

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Fay McCabe had tried several programs to lose weight: Jenny Craig, Weight Watchers, LA Weight Loss.

She lost 10 pounds on Jenny Craig but grew tired of the prepackaged meals. Once she stopped eating them, she gained the weight back. Weight Watchers was better, but she didn't like attending meetings and talking in front of people. She didn't want to hear their issues either. And the LA Weight Loss bars and supplements got old.

So she turned to someone else to help her with her weight loss: her doctor, Dr. Rebecca Hunton. The result: a 50-pound weight loss in two years.

"I eat regular food, and I eat a lot of food," said McCabe, 57, of Viera. "I just eat healthier things, vegetables, lean meats, nuts, a piece of fruit for a snack. I also exercise more. I go to the gym five times a week."

For years, people who wanted to lose weight turned to commercial diet programs, such as Jenny Craig, Nutrisystem and Slim Fast, among others, their ads touting the program's ease, testimonials and unbelievable before and after photos. Some tried fad diets, such as South Beach, Atkins, Cabbage

Soup and the Master Cleanse, the lemon juice, maple syrup and cayenne pepper concoction Beyonce drank to slim down for the movie "Dreamgirls."

In the meantime, Americans continued to get fatter. Today, two-thirds are overweight or obese.

So perhaps it is time doctors got involved in weight loss. And no, we're not talking Physicians Weight Loss Centers or a doc simply looking at a BMI chart and telling a patient to lose weight.

Hunton recently introduced the WellSpring Healthy Weight Loss Program at her practice in Suntree. The program uses Metagenics' FirstLine Therapy, which incorporates an eating plan, exercise, supplements and stress management. FLT is described as a therapeutic lifestyle change program that also treats chronic health problems, such as high cholesterol, metabolic syndrome (a precursor to diabetes) and unhealthy body composition.

Hunton said she started the program because so many of her patients wanted to lose weight.

"A lot of them were going elsewhere and losing the weight, but not necessarily getting healthy, and gaining it back and then some," she said.

Her program begins with blood work. Hunton then makes specific recommendations based on lab results to determine a person's nutrient needs and metabolic profile.

For example, Tina Lange's blood work revealed she is prediabetic and vitamin D deficient. So the 37-year-old mother of two, who also is the public relations manager for the practice, takes a vitamin D supplement, a supplement to fight fatigue, fish oil, which is recommended for all the patients, and makes sure to eat three meals a day plus snacks.

She also was advised to start exercising for 30 minutes a day three times a week, in addition to her one-day-a-week roller derby practice. Her goal: Lose 25 pounds.

"She takes your whole lifestyle into account," said Lange of Satellite Beach, about Hunton. She had tried Weight Watchers but was looking for a more personalized program.

"She's not only looking at your weight. She's looking at your blood work, stress level, sleep patterns, that's all part of this FirstLine Therapy idea. It's basically the idea of taking all these things into account in formulating a strategy for wellness."

Three-phase program

Hunton's program has three phases. Phase 1 is the cleanse. Patients are asked to slowly eliminate processed foods, caffeine and bad carbs. Processed foods create inflammation, which can lead to patients holding on to unwanted weight, according to Hunton. Phase 1 also focuses on getting the body rehydrated.

Phase 2 is the personalized weight-loss plan. There is no calorie counting. Rather, a certain number of servings are recommended from various food groups. Patients are encouraged to eat three times a day, plus drink two Metagenics' UltraMeal shakes. The shakes, full of vitamins and minerals, are not meal replacements but can be substituted for a meal if combined with something else, such as fruit or nuts.

"We're going to guide you on what types of food you're supposed to eat every day," Hunton said. "We're supposed to eat those variety of foods for our bodies to be healthful. There's nutrients in foods that we need."

And phase 3 is the stabilization phase, where a patient transitions from weight loss to maintenance.

Hunton said she occasionally recommends B-12 vitamin shots to give patients increased energy. These do not replace regular multivitamins. She also may use hCG shots as a "plateau buster" for patients stagnant in their weight loss. hCG, which stands for human chorionic gonadotrophin, is a hormone produced during pregnancy. Some believe it helps to curb appetite. She does not use it in conjunction with a low-calorie diet like many other programs.

The program costs \$60 a week, including supplements. Patients are expected to lose two to four pounds a week.

Joan Salge Blake, a registered dietitian and clinical associate professor at Boston University, praised such an integrated approach to weight loss. She would like to see dietitians and doctors work together more.

But she prefers people make up for nutritional deficiencies with food, not supplements. For example, B-12 can be found naturally in animal products and in synthetic forms, such as fortified cereals.

"It's always food first," she said. "Because it's not just one nutrient in food. I'm not just going to have milk because it's a good source of calcium. But it's also a good source of vitamin D, potassium. But then, after we try food first, for some reason you're not meeting your nutrient needs, you go to a supplement."

'Treat the whole person'

Dr. Lance Maki, who owns MAKImd Restoration Medicine on Merritt Island, also is taking a comprehensive approach to help patients lose weight. Like Hunton, he incorporates Metagenics' FLT, using the FDA-approved medical foods as part of a healthy eating plan. He also does lab work, looking at a patient's cholesterol levels and performs a micronutrient analysis.

He even has Annette Sallee, a health and wellness coach, work with patients to figure out why they medicate with food. She teaches them how to eat properly, exercise and set realistic goals in addition to holding them accountable in a nonjudgmental manner.

"We want them to eat healthy, every three hours, not allow themselves to get hungry," she said. "Good high-quality nonprocessed foods. Fruits and vegetables and lean protein, drinking half their body weight in ounces of water, and sleeping. Sleep is huge for weight loss."

Maki's program is 12 weeks and costs less than \$100 a week, including the UltraMeal shakes, bars and weekly consultations with Sallee. Some participants receive B-12 shots at an additional cost. Patients are expected to lose one to two pounds a week.

"We try to treat the whole person," said Maki, adding he spends a lot of time with the patients, not only discussing what to eat but overall health and wellness concerns. "We are not recommending that people diet, rather that they change their diet to eating healthy the rest of their lives."

Of course, this all sounds like a no-brainer, especially for someone who has struggled with their weight for years. They know the refrain: Diets don't work, lifestyle changes do.

But when people get to the point where they are seeking "this kind of help, they will do whatever is necessary to lose weight and be healthy," Sallee said.

Plus, a physician can make recommendations based on lab results, medical history, body composition and a person's symptoms and tailor a plan that works for them.

So far, Hunton's patients are pleased with the results. Some, like McCabe, started before it was even an official program.

Debbie Pedicini, 55, of Melbourne, has lost 8 pounds and dropped one dress size in six weeks. She even has stopped taking medicine for her arthritis. She is no longer in pain. She said she is happier, more energetic and more alert.

"Some days I would get up and say, 'Oh I want to go back to bed.' I don't have those days anymore," she said. "It's an easy program to follow, and it works. It definitely works."

McCabe, who is maintaining her weight, has had to make some sacrifices: no ice cream, cookies, white flour or white sugar. But she doesn't miss those foods.

She still comes to WellSpring for supplements, B-12 shots and lab work. She no longer takes prescription drugs. She was on high blood pressure pills.

"I'm happy," she said. "My blood work is good and I feel good."

"I needed to be healthier if I was going to be around," she added. "I didn't want to be around and not be healthy."

Diet Rx

The WellSpring Healthy Weight Loss Program

Where: 21 Suntree Place, Melbourne

Call: 321-254-6803

MAKImd Restoration Medicine

Where: 190 S. Sykes Creek Parkway, Suite 3, Merritt Island

Call: 321-305-5970

Online: makimd.com

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