

The Power of Ten

The number ten has many interesting facts associated with it. It is the number of digits on both our hands and indeed the Roman numeral for ten is “X” which some scholars interpret as representing two crossed hands. Importantly, it is the basis of our number system. “Deca” means ten so a decade is ten years, a decagon has ten sides, a crab is a decapod (having ten legs), and the Decalogue is the biblical name for the Ten Commandments. Obviously, the number has great importance in many areas. One I would like to discuss is its importance to health.

It is well documented that weight loss can provide numerous health benefits. Particularly exciting is the fact that for many of us these can be realized with a reduction of as little as 10% of one’s body weight. If you are overweight or obese you have learned that you are at risk for many health problems. You need to lose weight for more than appearance. Make the focus your health! This direction will add immediacy to the problem which may jump start your weight loss effort!

If you look at the amount of weight you need to lose to bring your Body Mass Index into the normal range (BMI of 18.5-24.9) you have set a goal but if that requires losing 25, 50, 100 pounds or more it can appear overwhelming if not impossible. Here is where the number 10 first comes to play a role. Set an initial goal of ten pounds of weight loss. This is achievable in a relative short amount of time. The exact time will depend upon your unique metabolism and general health, level of activity (exercise), and caloric control. A reasonable weekly goal for most of us is one half to two and one half pounds a week. (Please note, I said “reasonable weekly goal for most of us...” Always see a **physician** prior to starting any diet or exercise program!) Once you succeed in losing the first 10 pounds, set your next goal at an additional ten pounds or a cumulative loss of 10% of your initial body weight. Remember, the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first ten steps-excuse the literary license but this is about ten! Small steps or mini-goals are less daunting, more easily attainable and our confidence and determination increase as we continuously succeed.

What can we expect to achieve with a 10% weight loss? David Katz MD,MPH director of Yale University’s Prevention Research Center and of the Yale Preventive Medicine Center and bestselling author has said that “Lifestyle changes that include healthier diets, regular physical activity, and weight loss of 7-10% have shown phenomenal health benefits that can be more effective than medication.” Lowering body weight can reverse or prevent diabetes; lower blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels; eliminate or improve sleep apnea and other sleep problems; and improve your self esteem. According to Dr. Katz, 90% of Type II diabetes, 80% of heart disease, and 60% of cancers are preventable with healthier lifestyles and normal body weights.

In my office, I have several one gallon plastic bottles filled with water. Each of these weighs 8 pounds. As my patients lose weight I ask them to carry one or more around the office to demonstrate the weight they no longer have to lug around. It is rewarding for me to see the smiles that spread across their faces and their eyes shine brightly as they realize what their weight loss has accomplished in terms of just their energy! (If you want to see what just 10 pounds of weight loss will mean in terms of your own endurance and you are fresh out of empty gallon jugs, drop by your local grocery store and pick up a gallon of milk in one hand and a quart of milk in the other and do a few laps around the aisles. You will be amazed at the effort it takes. If the manager stops you, please **don't mention my name** but innocently state you are there on doctor's orders. They will leave you alone although they will watch you with furtive glances! Be sure to put the milk back in the cooler when you are done.

Are there other benefits to the loss of ten pounds? There certainly are and we will explore others in future articles but let me close with just one that I find most impressive. Overweight and obesity are risk factors for osteoarthritis of the knee. In the July 2005 issue of the medical journal *Arthritis & Rheumatism* a study was published which demonstrated that the loss of one pound results in a four-fold reduction in the load placed on the knee joint. Assuming one is able to walk a mile in 1200 steps, the lead author of the study Stephen P. Messier, PhD of the JB Snow Biomechanics Laboratory of Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina states the a 10 pound weight loss would result in each knee being subjected to 48,000 pounds less in compressive load per mile walked! That would be the equivalent of taking the weight of two and one half full grown African elephants off each knee!

Weight loss is about much more than appearance. Your health should be the priority! That being said however, along with the benefits I have mentioned you will improve your appearance. You will have a twinkle in your eye and a new swagger in your walk knowing you have made significant changes in your health. Your friends, family and even strangers will compliment you on your looks. Your clothing will fit better and you will once again be able to wear those jeans or slacks or shirts or suit you have tucked away in the back of your closet. All of these are good things!!

Once again, always see a physician prior to starting any diet or exercise program!
In my office you always see the doctor. My staff and I are here to help you.

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