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5 Weight-Loss Websites That Work

Mon, Aug 09, 2010

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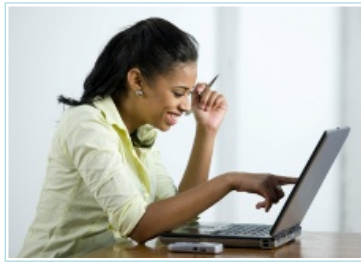
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More people need to shed pounds, according to a CDC report released last week showing another uptick in the nation's obesity rate. And one way to lose weight is to go online and head for Web sites designed to help. Participants in a study published last week in the Journal of Medical Internet Research who entered their meals and physical activity in online diaries at least once a month for roughly two years were more likely to lose weight—and keep it off—than others who did so less diligently. Many weight-loss sites offer this feature, but there's more to shedding pounds than making diary entries, says study author Kristine Funk, a researcher at the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research in Portland, Ore. An effective weight-loss site is interactive, offering access to goal-setting modules and record-keeping tools. It provides support, letting users communicate with each other and with nutrition and exercise experts. It encourages accountability, prompting users with E-mails and phone calls to record their weight, exercise, and calorie intake. It's personalized, tailoring meal plans and workouts to the individual. And it's trustworthy, providing clear and credible health information. Registered dietitian Susan Burke March, author of Making Weight Control Second Nature: Living Thin Naturally, likes the five below.



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CalorieKing (\$12 monthly, \$85 for a year). A food and exercise database linked to a personal diary converts meals and activities into calories so you can visualize if you're hitting your weight-loss goals. A drag-and-drop interface makes meal plans easy to create, even for the least technologically savvy. Guidance to successful meal planning is provided. March believes that its weekly progress charts and graphs can motivate dieters.

Nutrihand (\$9.95 per month or free when you join with your nutritionist or dietitian). Featurewise, this site is more plain vanilla than rocky road, but if you're getting professional help offline, it allows you and your counselor to work together online on meal plans, shopping lists, and fitness goals. You can print out reports to bring to your sessions. Diabetics who use insulin pumps can upload data from their glucometer on a private and secure network and chart or graph glucose levels, blood pressure, and other personal data to tweak pump settings and track health status.

SparkPeople (free). It's supported by ads that run the gamut from hotels to granola

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bars, but get-slim-quick gimmicks are blessedly absent. The focus is on meeting simple goals: eat less, exercise more. March advises her clients to take advantage of the site's nutritional planning tools. Users can create meal plans based on calories and dietary restrictions, plan meals up to a week in advance, and save favorite meals to a daily log. Members exchange advice through forums, blogs, and message boards. Bonus: The more time you spend on the site, the more SparkPoints you earn towards prizes like T-shirts, water bottles, and exercise DVDs.

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Vtrim (\$695 for six months). From the University of Vermont, Vtrim requires dedication and a good chunk of cash. You sign on for a six-month commitment consisting of 24 one-hour classes with approximately 20 other members guided by a Vtrim-certified "facilitator" trained in diet, nutrition, or weight management. Groups meet weekly in chat rooms to discuss specific habits geared towards healthy living. They utilize graphs, charts, body mass index, featured recipes, and other tools to help track calories. Although the price tag packs a hefty punch, Vtrim takes a sensible approach to dieting that focuses on changing behavior, not starvation. In fact, it shies away from diets entirely and encourages walking as the primary form of exercise.

WeightWatchers (\$47.90 for the first month and \$17.95 for each additional month, plus a \$23.95 start-up fee). If your chief concern is diet and not fitness, it's a great resource. Although members are encouraged to exercise, the emphasis is on healthy eating and community support. Best known for its "points system," WeightWatchers bases its program on choosing healthy foods that satisfy hunger as long as possible. The site keeps track of food intake; provides recipes, meal ideas, and dining out tips; and creates personalized weekly progress charts. Signing up online won't allow you to attend local meetings, but it does allow you to access your plan from your cell phone.

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