

Diet and Exercise

Living in an urban city, many people actively lose weight to achieve a toned and balanced physique, with common strategies such as dieting alone (controlling the eating schedule and the menus) and combining exercise with dieting. Which of the two methods is more effective? Most importantly, do they really help in shredding excess body fat?

In a study, 62 overweight women were divided into two groups for an eight-week weight loss program, with one group adopting the strategy of dieting alone (“nutrition intervention”) and the other adopting the strategy of combining exercise with dieting (“exercise and nutrition intervention”).

Weight-loss strategy	Body weight (kg)	Body fat percentage (%)	Fat mass (kg)
Nutrition intervention	-4	-1.6	-3
Exercise and nutrition intervention	-3.5	-2.9	-3.6

Joseph, G., Arviv-Eliashiv, R., & Tesler, R. (2020). A comparison of diet versus diet + exercise programs for health improvement in middle-aged overweight women. *Women's health (London, England)*, 16, 1745506520932372. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745506520932372>

The results indicated that both strategies indeed significantly reduced the participants’ weights by 3.5 to 3.9 kg on average. However, the “exercise and nutrition intervention” strategy yielded better overall results, with the key differences lying not in the weight figures, but in the quality of body composition, the extent of fat reduction, and the potential for long-term maintenance. Dieting alone easily leads to muscle loss and a reduced basal metabolic rate. In contrast, combining exercise with dieting significantly preserves muscle mass, making the body more inclined to lose pure fat.

Therefore, in addition to controlling diet, regular exercise is indispensable. Engaging in both aerobic exercise and resistance training is essential for achieving effective fat loss and maintaining a good physique. Aerobic exercises (such as brisk walking, jogging and swimming) directly burn fat, preventing the mere loss of muscle or body weight. On the other hand, resistance training not only prevents muscle loss, but also increases muscle mass, maintaining or even elevating the basal metabolic rate, so that we can continue to burn calories even at rest, thereby achieving a virtuous cycle of “building muscle while losing fat”. Therefore, we should accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week in 5 or more sessions, each lasting 30 to 60 minutes. On top of that, we should schedule 2 to 3 sessions of resistance training per week, with at least 1 to 2 days of rest in-between.

To achieve an ideal physique, in addition to developing good dietary habits, engaging in an appropriate amount of exercise is also necessary. However, we should remember that the ideal rate of weight loss is about 1 to 2 pounds (approximately 0.5 to 1 kg) per week. With the right methods, everyone can surely succeed in losing weight!