

Reducing Diets Should be Properly Planned

By EVELYN E. MOORE, Field Officer in Rural Sociology, Department of Agriculture, Palmerston North

SINCE it has become fashionable as well as beneficial to health to be slim a great many women have at some time or another put themselves on a reducing routine, with varying success. Because of this fashion ideas for weight reducing have become a commercial proposition, and many people go to unnecessary expense and possibly adversely affect their health by following one or more of the advertised aids to reducing.

MANY of the so-called aids are of little value; others, which necessitate the consumption of glandular extracts such as thyroxin or the use of appetite-reducing drugs may have a harmful effect on health if their consumption is not carefully controlled.

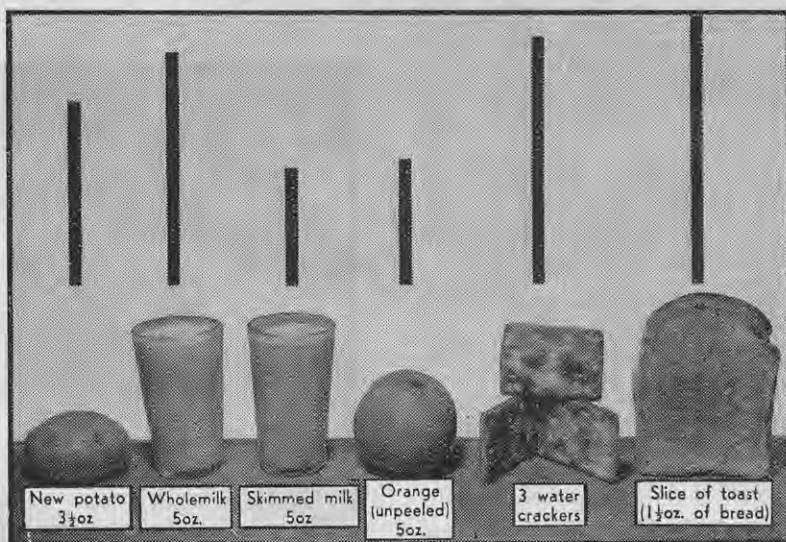
Massage is often recommended as a means of reducing, but though it may result in a redistribution of fat, massage alone cannot remove it. It may occasionally seem to do this by toning up flabby muscles, but it is certainly not an easy way out for the decidedly overweight person. Exercises designed to improve the posture or general figure, though they may be of great benefit taken in conjunction with a reducing diet, are alone rarely of benefit in weight reduction.

Exercise Only Increases Appetite

Physical exercise as a means of reducing weight is also advocated, but it seldom causes more than a transitory weight loss through loss of water from perspiration. In the average healthy person outdoor exercise increases the appetite and makes any restriction of food consumption more difficult, and the middle-aged adult who has an occasional burst of enthusiasm for strenuous exercise is apt to do himself more harm than good, especially if his normal work is sedentary.

The outdoor manual worker or person in hard physical training invariably has a healthy appetite and such people frequently put on weight when they retire to more sedentary pursuits, as their appetite may not decrease in proportion, showing it can be an unreliable guide to food requirements.

It is also sometimes stated that reducing fluid and salt consumption to a minimum are ways of losing weight. Neither water nor salt alone, however, has any energy or fattening value and restricting their consumption is unlikely to have any effect on weight loss over a long period. For a short time restriction in fluid or salt intake might produce a weight loss, through a loss of water from the body of 2 or 3 lb. or even more, but it quickly stabilises at the lower level without any real loss of fat. Such water, of course, is very quickly and easily regained.



The comparative energy values (potential fattening values) of some common foods.

Misconceptions about Fattening Foods

There are also a great many misconceptions about so-called fattening foods and reducing foods and reducing diets. In the first place the only way to judge the energy or potential fattening value of a food is by means of its calorie* or energy content. Naturally fats and foods containing a high proportion of fat are highest in this respect, but all so-called slimming foods such as orange juice, apples, and raw vegetables still have energy value; some, like fairy toast and dry water crackers, have a comparatively high calorie content for their weight.

In the planning of a reducing diet the nutritive value of a food—that is, its protein†, vitamin, and mineral content—also requires consideration, for the person on a reducing diet does not have a reduced requirement for these nutrients. Thus foods with a high nutritive value in proportion to their calorie content such as fruits and vegetables—including a moderate serving of potato, for it is a valuable food—skimmed milk, lean meat, and eggs should be the mainstay of this type of diet. Cereals such as bread and porridge should be restricted in quantity and all foods with a high energy value in proportion to their vitamin and mineral content such as sugar and all sweets, cakes, biscuits, pastries, steamed puddings, sauces, pickles, jams, cereal dishes like spaghetti, gravy, salad dressings, and fried foods should be rigidly excluded.

* A calorie is a unit measuring the energy or potential fattening value of food; in the same way an ounce is a unit measuring its weight.

† Protein is a nutrient which constitutes a large part of the muscle and various organs and which, like vitamins and minerals, must be present in adequate amounts in the food eaten if health is to be maintained.

Omitting meals or having fasting days or semi-fasting days when orange juice or water crackers are allowed are not advisable as a means of losing weight, as the temptation to eat between meals or eat more at succeeding meals remains, and a period of fasting, especially in the person carrying on normal work, is apt to result in a feeling of lassitude, faintness, reduced efficiency in work, and possibly reduced resistance to infection. Instead the consumption of three balanced meals each day, with raw fruit (2 to 3 servings daily) and eggs, salads (no salad dressing), lean meat, and vegetables, skimmed milk (1 pint each day) alone or in tea, coffee or desserts like junket, butter (1oz.), and wholemeal bread (3 or 4 slices each day) forming the basis of the dietary, should result in gradual weight loss without any of the unpleasant symptoms associated with sudden and drastic weight reduction. Wholemeal bread is just as fattening as white bread, but it has a higher vitamin and mineral content and is therefore of especial value in a reducing diet when the total food consumption is less than normal.

Cause of Overweight

There are many fallacies about the best way to diet, but there is also the often-heard fallacy that overweight is an imposition of Nature—for example, it may be ascribed vaguely to glands—and it is therefore regarded as a waste of time or as harmful to health to try to reduce the weight to within normal limits.

Some people may tend to put on weight more easily than others, but overweight is caused basically by eating more food each day than is used to provide energy for work and other bodily functions. Thus it is possible for overweight persons to lose weight and to maintain the body weight at a lower level if they persevere and