

SLIMMING DOWN

Staying Healthy with Dr. Aieta, N.D.

People always ask me if there are any dietary supplements or eating tips that actually work to help them lose weight faster — choices that go above and beyond proper food choices and exercise. There are many different supplements that I recommend, but let's concentrate on just one today.

Fish oil is high in "good fats" called omega-3 fatty acids, and some Australian researchers have discovered that getting a daily dose of fish oil can help you shed extra weight. For this study, researchers worked with 68 people, all overweight or obese, for three months. The participants were split into four groups, none of which had to alter their normal diets. The first group was told to take daily fish oil and do moderate exercise three times a week. The second group had daily fish oil and no exercise. The third group took

daily sunflower oil, plus participated in moderate exercise three times a week and the last group had daily sunflower oil and no exercise.

The fish-oil-plus-exercise group lost the most weight, an average of five pounds over the trial period, without changing their regular diets. None of the other groups lost any weight, not even the sunflower-oil-plus-exercise group.

Researchers believe that the fatty acids in fish oil step up your body's fat-burning abilities, making your workouts more effective and helping you lose more weight.

There are several dietary rules that I also have all of my patients follow in conjunction with taking fish oil. The first is to consume protein at each meal. This assures that your blood sugar won't spike up too quickly, which causes the body to overproduce the fat-storing hormone insu-

lin. When you eat a meal that is devoid of protein, it tends to be naturally higher in starch or sugar, thus inducing insulin release and fat storage.

Another rule is to consume more of your daily calories earlier in the day and less towards the end. Numerous studies have shown that people who do so lose considerably more weight in the long run than those who pile on their calories later in the day. A similar study was done feeding two groups the same amount of calories a day, with one group consuming all their calories in two meals, while the other consumed six small meals. The group that ate the six small meals lost significantly more weight than the group that ate only two meals. So, my final rule is to eat multiple small meals throughout the day, as opposed to just two or three large ones.

So if you are having trouble losing



weight, despite diet changes and exercising, start taking some fish oil, maybe two to three grams a day, and follow some of my dietary rules. The weight should start melting off in no time.

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board-certified and licensed Naturopathic Physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com, or visit www.DrAieta.com for additional information.

UNCRAMPING

Women's Fitness with Lisa Thomas

Anyone who has experienced a muscle cramp, or a dreaded charley horse can attest to how painful life can get at a moment's notice. (I hate those charley horses!) Muscle cramps occur when muscles involuntarily contract and cannot relax.

Cramps or muscle spasms can last anywhere from a few seconds to a quarter of an hour — *ouch!* To make matters worse, these little nagging fits of pain seem to creep up out of nowhere and do their best to make sure that we yelp loud enough for anyone within the general vicinity to know we're hurting.

It is not uncommon for a cramp to recur multiple times before subsiding for good. The cramp may involve a part of a muscle, an entire muscle or several muscles that act together. The skeletal muscles most prone to cramping are the muscles in the calf, thigh and arch of the foot. These are the most notorious cramp sites, and for good reason.

Thankfully, most cramps resolve spontaneously within a few seconds to minutes.

Strangely, it's not known exactly why muscle cramps develop. Strange because of how common these painful and nagging little issues are.

Research has shown that high-intensity exercise, insufficient stretching before exercise, exercising in the heat, significant

amounts of fluids lost and muscle fatigue may all play a role in cramping. One other important factor is the imbalances in the levels of electrolytes (sodium, potassium, chloride, calcium and phosphate) in the blood.

Water, alone, may not be enough to hydrate the body or to replenish electrolytes after a high-intensity workout. You might need more. The muscles' sodium is the substance of most concern when replacing fluids lost through exercising, so plain water won't necessarily cut it. Although, let's be honest, drinking water is rarely discouraged. All I'm saying is that you might be better off adding a little electrolyte kick to the beverage.

You can experiment with making efforts to stay hydrated. For example, supplement your diet with bananas (for the potassium) and refuel with electrolyte drinks. These techniques don't always prevent cramping, but they are worth trying.

Oh, and one more thing that may or may not help with muscle spasms or to alleviate the pain is a light massage. For me, such massaging might not get rid of my spasm, but it does help me relax some.

If you're looking for a solid electrolyte replacement drink, try Emer'Gen-C packages. They come in boxes of 36 prepackaged mixes, and all you have to do is add

it to your water. And don't just use these after workouts; taking electrolyte replacements before bed can help with nighttime cramps too. And, let's be honest, the only thing worse than a daytime cramp is one that wakes you up from a sound sleep.

Lisa Thomas is a personal trainer/fitness coach in the Greater Springfield area, as well as owner of Thomas Fitness Center and Fit Kidz of Massachusetts. Contact her at (413) 426-5543 or l.fitness@hotmail.com, or visit www.thomasfitnesscenter.com.



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