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With Spring on our doorstep, we often start thinking about healthy lifestyles and feeling great for Summer. There is a broad awareness of the need to maintain a healthy body weight for good health but it is a complicated issue that many people struggle with. You can see if you are in a healthy weight range by calculating your Body Mass Index (BMI) using a weight to height ratio. A healthy weight is considered between 20 and 25 and can be calculated at www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumerinformation/bmicalculator.cfm.

Healthy eating and activity are keys to reducing obesity and maintaining a healthy weight. Healthy eating means eating more fresh fruit, vegetables, fish, wholegrain breads and cereals, while avoiding foods high in sugar or fat. Protein is important if you want to build muscle and can be found in lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs and nuts. Drinking plenty of water is also vital.

Choose activity you enjoy and start by doing 10 minutes three times per day, building up to 30-40 minutes. Combine cardiovascular training for aerobic fitness with resistance training to build lean muscle and strength. Some people find having a goal in mind to work towards helpful, and Sports Hawke's Bay run regular events to participate in. Many people qualify for a Green Prescription which entitles them to face to face clinics at various medical centres, low cost exercise sessions, follow up and support.

A number of products are available to use in addition to lifestyle measures, to help weight loss and have different benefits for different people. **Duromine** contains the drug Phentermine and works by directly affecting the area of the brain that controls your appetite making you feel less hungry. It is only available on prescription and your doctor will check if it is suitable for you. Because it is a stimulant it is usually taken short term and, as with all medicines, may have unwanted side effects. Most commonly it causes wakefulness, faster heart rate, nervousness and stomach upsets. The usual dose of Duromine is one capsule every day, best taken at breakfast.

Xenical contains the drug Orlistat and can be used in people with a BMI >27 where other risk factors are present. Normally, dietary fats are broken down in the gut by enzymes called lipases. Xenical works by interfering with the lipases to stop roughly 30% of the fat in a meal to pass through the gut undigested. This reduces the calories that go into the body and are stored as fatty tissue. Because fats are not being digested, most of the side effects relate to this and include abdominal pain, wind, diarrhoea and oily stools. Xenical can be purchased after a consultation with your pharmacist and it is recommended that a multivitamin containing vitamin A, D and E is taken with it.

Calorie controlled meal replacements include the Optifast range and many others. Optifast combines a very low calorie diet with a lifestyle program with recipes, advice for healthy eating and an exercise planner. The program simply replaces meals with Optifast shakes, bars, soups or desserts which are designed to restrict energy intake, whilst still maintaining healthy nutrition. Reducing calorie (energy) intake means the body starts to draw energy from its own fat stores. Up to three meals a day can be replaced depending on the amount of weight to be lost.

As always, Peter is available at Ahuriri Pharmacy to answer any questions on health, medicines, measure your BMI, blood pressure or blood sugar levels.

Because weight loss is never "one solution for all" and weight gain happens for different reasons (stress, illness, hormones, stage of life, nutritional deficiencies, food intolerances etc) a more individualised approach may be more effective. At Ahuriri Pharmacy, we are pleased to have **nutritionist Alison Cowell**, based at the pharmacy on Wednesdays. Alison offers a 60 minute health and nutrition consultation that goes through a head to toe of everything going on for that person, making note of nutrients that are lacking.

A food intolerance test can be done to assess if intolerances are inhibiting the absorption of nutrients. If this happens, the brain will try to store as many nutrients as possible in order to protect the immune system and this leads to weight gain. People with food intolerances often feel hungry even after they have eaten simply because nutrients do not reach their destination. Intolerances can also lead to bloating and puffiness. A personal eating plan can be drawn up, choosing the foods highest in all the nutrients that are deficient, to get the body back into balance. Weight loss happens as a happy consequence of this.