

Diet Secrets

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Some of you may have noticed that during the last few months I have been dieting and losing weight. As most of my friends know, my anathema toward exercise is only exceeded by my love of food and eating in general. Dieting is not something I like to do. People have asked me “what’s your secret?” I am afraid there is not a secret. Human beings gain weight when their daily caloric consumption exceeds their daily caloric expenditure. Human beings lose weight when their daily caloric consumption is less than their daily caloric expenditure. Simply put: if you want to lose weight eat less and exercise more. And to lose a lot of weight you have to do it over a long period of time. In order to do this I actually have to write down everything that I eat every day. When I hit my daily limit, I have to stop. It means that I have to make some tough decisions sometimes about what I eat. The weight doesn’t come off quickly. I only lost one or two pounds a week. Some weeks the scale didn’t seem to move at all. Slow steady progress eventually works. There are “fad diets” out there that claim to make weight loss quick and easy. Don’t believe it. There is no easy solution. Many of the fad diets do work, and some of them even safely. When you really look hard at them though, what you find is that basically they are limiting your calorie intake somehow. And, with the ones that really work, it takes time.

The “secret” to weight loss is like a lot of things: set goals, make a plan and follow it. There is no quick and easy secret. The basic idea applies to a lot of things. It applies to professional success. It applies to writing a dissertation (yeah, now that I know the grad students are reading this, you get free advice!). What you have to do is make steady consistent progress. It also applies to solving some of the social problems we face as a country (you had to know this was going there). Just like there is no quick and easy way to lose weight, there is no quick and easy way to solve most problems. What we need to do is set reasonable goals, make a plan and then stick to it. Progress will be slow. But, if it’s steady (one or two pounds a week) it adds up over time. When you see the latest “proposal” out of Congress or the White House, do a reality check: is it a “fad diet” designed to be an easy and painless stop gap measure? Or, is it the kind of long run (but probably painful) policy that eventually will solve the problem? One example, I think, is the Social Security Problem. As it stands now, the Federal Government collects at least as much in Social Security taxes as it spends. Indeed, over the last fifteen years, social security has been running a surplus (that’s why your other taxes are lower than they used to be, the government was spending the social security surplus to fund current expenditures). This is a case where our government (and both sides of the isle are to blame here, and I think equally so) took the short term painless solution. Now we have to face the long term consequences. There is, really, only one solution, just like losing weight: we have to lower the expenditures and increase the revenues for social security. Private accounts are a “smoke and mirrors” way of doing that (actually they lower the tax rate, but lower the expenditure even further). There are other “smoke and mirrors” policies out there (the Dems have their stupid ideas too). The choice we have to make as a society is balance, not too different than the choices I’ve had to make with food in the

last few months. It's time, as a nation, to stop looking for quick fixes and make some hard decisions.