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Forget "dieting"

To permanently drop pounds, you need to change habits.

PLANNING TO GO on a diet after the holidays? Listen up: Research shows that dieting doesn't work.

"People have unrealistic expectations," says Thomas A. Wadden, director of the Center for Weight and Eating Disorders at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. "On a short-term basis, they adopt saint-like behaviors by avoiding all their favorite foods. But over the long term, they cannot sustain those kinds of changes."

What does work? Lifestyle changes. To succeed, you need to learn how to plan — and not simply exert willpower, Wadden says.

TIPS FROM THE EXPERT:

- **Learn food tactics.** Protein foods are the most filling, but a calorie is a calorie — regardless of the type of food. Learn to eat smaller portions. Eliminate hidden sugars and fats. Replace sugary soda with water or diet drinks. Enjoy favorite foods sparingly in a balanced diet; it's not "all or nothing."

- **"Exercise" whenever you can.** To increase your activity, hide the TV and garage remotes, take steps instead of elevators and park far from entrances.

- **Be positive.** "If you think you'll never be successful," Wadden says, "you probably won't be."

- **Sleep more.** It will help you feel and function better and will even regulate your appetite.

— Susan T. Lennon **W**