It’s Not About Your Weight

By Coach Vicente Alvarado
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For most of our lives, we have been taught to believe one number tells us whether we're succeeding or failing with our health: Our weight.

Want to get healthier? Lose weight.

Want to look better? Lose weight.

Want to reduce your risk of health problems? Lose weight.

The fitness and diet industries have reinforced that message for decades with “weight-loss” programs, restrictive diets, packaged foods, shakes, low-carb plans, detoxes and endless hours of cardio promising to make the number on the scale go down.

But after years of coaching people at Training for Warriors Albuquerque, I believe we're asking the wrong question.
Instead of constantly asking: “How much weight do I need to lose?”

We should be asking: “What is my body made of?”

That changes the entire conversation.
The Scale Doesn't Tell the Whole Story

Two people can weigh exactly the same amount and have dramatically different body compositions.

One may carry significantly more lean muscle and less body fat. The other may have less muscle and considerably more body fat.

The scale can't tell you the difference.

It only tells you the total gravitational force of everything you're carrying—muscle, fat, bone, organs, water and everything else.

That's why I don't want our students obsessed with simply becoming lighter.

I want them focused on becoming stronger and healthier.
Those aren't necessarily the same thing.

If someone loses 20 pounds but loses a significant amount of muscle in the process, should we automatically consider that a success simply because the scale went down?

I don't.

The Weight-Loss Cycle

The majority of people who walk through our doors initially tell us some version of the same thing:

“I need to lose weight.”

Then we start asking questions.

Many have already tried multiple diets. They've eliminated carbohydrates. They've eaten salads every day. They've bought packaged diet foods. They've joined gyms. They've done cardio programs. They've counted calories aggressively. Some have spent thousands of dollars over the years. And frequently, they've lost weight.

The problem is what happens next.

The diet is so restrictive that it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. Eventually there's a vacation, birthday, wedding, stressful week at work, family emergency or simply a Saturday night dinner.

Life happens

They eat something that wasn't on “the diet.”
They feel like they failed.
One meal becomes a weekend. A weekend becomes a week.
Eventually they're back where they started—or sometimes heavier.
Then comes another diet.
Lose weight.
Regain it.
Start again.

That's the cycle commonly called yo-yo dieting, or weight cycling.
And after repeating it enough times, people don't just become frustrated with diets. They begin believing they are the problem.

Stop Building Your Life Around a Diet

Here's something I tell people:
If your nutrition program requires you to live in a perfect environment forever, it's probably not a very good long-term nutrition program.

You have birthdays.
You have holidays.
You go to restaurants.
You take vacations.

Someone is going to put a piece of cake in front of you eventually.
The goal shouldn't be creating a life in which you can never eat another piece of birthday cake.

The goal should be developing nutrition habits strong enough that one piece of birthday cake doesn't derail your entire lifestyle.
There's an enormous difference. Food Is Fuel—But It's Also Nutrition
Your body needs more than simply “fewer calories.”
It needs adequate protein, carbohydrates, dietary fats, vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients.

Protein is particularly important for people who strength train because adequate protein, combined with resistance training, supports the maintenance and development of skeletal muscle.
Carbohydrates aren't automatically the enemy either. They provide an important source of energy, particularly for physically active people.
Dietary fats also perform important physiological functions.
The objective isn't to identify one macronutrient as “bad.”
It's learning how much you need, what foods you're choosing, and how those choices fit within your total nutrition and activity.
That's education.
And education is far more useful over a lifetime than another list of foods you're forbidden to eat.
Muscle Changes the Conversation
This is where I believe the traditional weight-loss mentality misses something incredibly important:
Lean muscle matters.
As we age, maintaining muscle becomes increasingly important to physical function, strength and independence.
That's one reason resistance training is such an important part of what we do at Training for Warriors Albuquerque.
We're not simply trying to make someone smaller.
We're trying to help them become stronger.
Imagine someone beginning a strength-training and nutrition program and losing five pounds of body fat while gaining three pounds of lean mass.
The scale only moves two pounds.
If that person judges the entire experience by body weight, they may think:
“This isn't working.”
But their body composition may be moving in exactly the direction we want.
Their clothes may fit differently.
They're stronger.
They're carrying less fat.
They're maintaining or adding lean tissue.
That's progress the bathroom scale doesn't adequately capture.

Excess Body Fat and Health

None of this means body fat doesn't matter.

It absolutely does.

Excess body fat—particularly visceral fat stored around the abdominal organs—is associated with increased risk of several metabolic and cardiovascular conditions, including type 2 diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease.

But that's different from saying every pound of body fat directly causes disease.

Health is complicated.

Genetics, age, activity, sleep, nutrition, smoking, alcohol consumption, medications, medical conditions and numerous other factors can contribute to an individual's health.

That's another reason simplistic messages like “just lose weight” aren't enough.

We need to look at the whole person.

What About Weight-Loss Medications?

We also need to acknowledge that the weight-management landscape has changed significantly.

Medications such as GLP-1–based therapies have become increasingly common and can be medically appropriate for certain people when prescribed and monitored by qualified healthcare professionals.

But medication doesn't eliminate the importance of nutrition, resistance training and maintaining lean mass.

For someone losing substantial body weight—whether through medication, dietary changes or other approaches—preserving muscle should remain an important consideration.

Medication decisions belong between individuals and their healthcare providers.

As coaches, our lane is different.

We teach people how to train, eat, build sustainable habits and become stronger.

Stop Chasing a Number

After 15 years of owning a gym and coaching people, I've become less interested in helping someone reach an arbitrary number on a scale.

I want to know:

Are you stronger?

Are you maintaining or building lean muscle?

Is your body composition improving?

Are you eating enough quality food to support your activity?

Do you have more energy?

Can you perform activities today that you couldn't perform six months ago?

Are you developing habits you can realistically maintain?

Are you becoming more capable as you get older?

Those questions tell me far more than:

“What do you weigh?”

The Goal Is a Stronger Life

We need to stop teaching people that health requires constantly starving themselves, avoiding entire food groups or punishing themselves with exercise every time they eat something they enjoy.

Exercise isn't punishment for eating.

Food isn't something you need to fear.

And the scale isn't your report card.

At Training for Warriors Albuquerque, our philosophy is built around something different:

Strength. Nutrition. Body composition. Accountability. Consistency. Longevity.

Eat real, nutrient-dense foods most of the time.

Get adequate protein.

Include carbohydrates and healthy fats appropriate for your individual needs.

Strength train.

Move your body.

Recover.

Enjoy your life.

And stop allowing one number on a bathroom scale to determine whether you believe you're succeeding.

Because ultimately:
It's not about losing weight. It's about building a stronger, healthier body you can live in for the rest of your life.
Stay strong, my friends.
Coach Vicente Alvarado
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