6 Weight-Loss Tricks That Don't Involve Dieting or (Much) Exercise

By Deborah Kotz, USNews.com

The advice for losing those stubborn extra pounds seems so simple: Eat less, and exercise more. But as anyone who's ever tried to lose a few pounds knows, putting that advice into practice is very tough. Cut back on calories too much, and you're overwhelmed by hunger and your metabolism may slow. Exercise like crazy, and the hunger pangs you feel a few hours later may trigger you to eat back all you've burned off-and then some.

And let's be honest, no one really wants to keep track of every bite of food. My teenage daughter, while reading this U.S. News article on restricting calories to live longer, asked me how many calories I ate each day. I told her I had no idea-though probably more than my body needs. Truth is, despite having ghostwritten a slew of bestselling weight-loss books in my previous life as a freelance writer, I've never actually been on a diet; I know my lack of discipline at sticking to a prescribed eating plan would make me fail miserably. Still, I'd like to shed the 10 pounds that I've gained over the past decade, and I'm wondering if there are a few tricks that can help me along. I asked Adriane Fugh-Berman, a physician and associate professor of complementary and alternative medicine at Georgetown University Medical Center, to give me some tips that have been backed up by solid research. (She previously helped me decipher the ingredients in QuickTrim, a weight-loss product being endorsed by the Kardashians.) Here's what she recommends:

1. Eat hot soup before a meal. Research suggests doing so before lunch or dinner helps people eat less. "That's probably because you can't eat hot soups fast, which gives your digestive tract time to send satiety signals out to your brain" before you begin the next course, says Fugh-Berman. She recommends eating a soup that is not cream based to save on fat and calories.

2. Don't eat heavily just before bed. Sure we've all heard the credo that body weight is all about calories in, calories out, but it turns out it may also matter when you eat. Fugh-Berman says she has seen preliminary research suggesting that taking in sweet, high-fat foods (ice cream, anyone?) right before bedtime appears to decrease calorie burning and increase fat storage during sleep. "Consuming that same snack earlier in the day doesn't appear to have the same effect," she says.

3. Live like a city dweller. People who live in cities weigh less than those who live in the suburbs probably because of "incidental walking," says Fugh-Berman. "Those few blocks that you walk to grab lunch or run an errand really do add up," she says. Plus, the daily activity is incorporated into your life so it doesn't feel like exercise. It's easy to do and not like a workout that you can skip or quit altogether. Don't live or work in a city? You can mimic the effect by parking a few blocks away from the drugstore, dry

cleaner, or post office. Fugh-Berman says she has a slim friend whose only exercise is using the stairs instead of the elevator to get to his office on the ninth floor. Going up and down once or twice a day gives him a fairly good calorie burn.

4. Try a dash of chili pepper. If you can stomach it, try a chili-laced appetizer right before your meal. It "appears to have appetite suppressant activity," says Fugh-Berman. "One study found that those who ate a chili-pepper-spiced food right before their meal ate less at the meal." Mix a teaspoonful of chopped chili pepper into mashed avocado, or sprinkle ¼ teaspoon of chili powder into chopped tomatoes for a predinner dip.

5. Limit caloric beverages. Drink 260 calories in a Starbucks grande caffè mocha (or a smoothie, or any other sweetened beverage) before lunch, and you'll still eat the same number of calories at your meal. But eat a bagel or handful of jellybeans containing 260 calories, and you'll actually consume less at lunch, according to one study. It's not clear whether our stomachs actually feel fuller from solid food or whether we trick ourselves into thinking that we haven't actually "eaten" if we're drinking calories rather than chewing them, says Fugh-Berman.

6. Weigh yourself once a day. This certainly helps me maintain my weight because I make a point to cut back on snacks if I've gained a little. And research backs me up. A 2006 study from Cornell University found that college freshmen instructed to weigh themselves every morning gained almost no weight during the school year compared with a 7-pound gain for those who weren't given a scale. Though I'm not sure how much the scale helps me personally. I find that every time I've lost a few pounds, I give myself a little permission to indulge-and the pounds come right back on.