

Weight reduction centers

It seems everyone is interested in losing weight these days. When it comes to weight loss, there is no shortage of options. There are many diet programs to choose from – each claiming to have the perfect plan for slimming you down. Check weight reduction centers or online programs out carefully before you sign a contract or pay any money down, or you may lose money instead of pounds.

Consider your needs

Before starting a weight loss program, consider these factors:

- **Experience with past diets.**
What did you like or dislike about them? Were you able to follow the diet? What worked or did not work for you? How did you feel physically and emotionally while on the diet?
- **Your preferences.**
Do you prefer to diet on your own or do you like to get support from a group? If you prefer group support, do you prefer online or in-person support?
- **Your budget.**
Does the cost fit your budget? Will you be required to buy supplements, meals, visit clinics or attend support meetings?

- **Other considerations.**

Do you have health conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease? Do you have cultural or ethnic requirements or preferences when it comes to food?

State regulation

Weight reduction centers that collect up-front fees and then go out of business have been a big problem in Wisconsin.

Weight reduction centers are regulated by state law. The law helps protect consumers and provides a way to obtain refunds for undelivered services. Under the law:

- Weight reduction programs with physical centers must disclose the identity and location of facilities available to customers. The general nature of the services to be provided should also be identified.
- Weight reduction centers must specify the length of time covered by the member's contract, not to exceed two years. If the contract includes a weight maintenance program, the contract can be longer but not to exceed three years.

- The full price of the membership must be disclosed, including any interest or other charges.
- New members must be informed of their three-day right to cancel.

To further protect consumers, weight reduction centers that require members to pay more than \$100 in advance fees are required to establish proof of financial responsibility with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

Choosing a weight reduction center

If you are interested in services provided by a weight reduction center, shop around and compare several. Consider the following before making a choice:

- Exactly what services are included in the membership fees? Most centers have several types of membership plans.
- Check references from people you know have used the program. Do not be swayed by celebrity endorsements or a few dramatic testimonials.

- Do you have health risks to consider – diabetes, heart issues? Will there be any kind of professional supervision provided? Consult with your personal physician before beginning any program.
- What are the fees? Find out the full costs and obligations of the membership, including extra charges for special dietary supplements or special foods. Is a maintenance program part of the package or does it cost extra? Can you afford the program?
- Is the center's location convenient? Do you find the atmosphere comfortable?
- Is the center well managed? Ask current and past members their opinions of the staff and the program.
- Is the program/center in good financial condition? How long has it been operating?
- Will you get a refund if you move away from the area or drop out of the center?

Do not feel pressured by persuasive sales techniques from center personnel. Take the time to thoroughly review the center/program and understand any contract you are asked to sign.

There is no single weight-loss diet that will help everyone who tries it. The key ingredient to any weight reduction program is your own willpower. Research has shown that while some dieters succeed in taking off weight, many fail to keep all of it off in the long run. To lose weight safely

and permanently requires long-term changes in daily eating and exercise habits.

Always consult with a physician, dietitian, or other qualified health professional regarding your personal circumstances before starting any new weight reduction program. Your doctor can review any medical problems that you have, any possible complications with medications you take and help you set weight loss goals. You can also discuss exercising safely, especially if you have current health issues or disabilities.

The reality is that almost any diet that restricts calories will result in weight loss, at least in the short term. The real challenge, keeping the weight off, comes with making the necessary lifestyle changes in healthy eating and regular physical activity as part of your normal routine.

For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

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