

Taking Pounds Off...Online

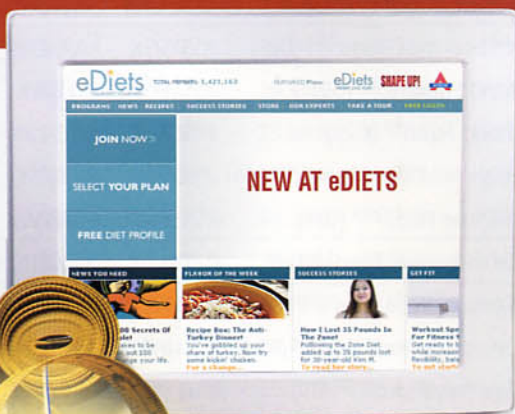
If losing weight is one of your new year's resolutions for 2004, all you need is willpower and a computer. Millions are dropping pounds online.

eDiets.com (www.ediets.com) is one of a growing number of Internet sites designed to help people create and stick to a diet plan. For five dollars a week, members can personalize a plan to fit their food preferences, lifestyle, and any special health needs. The site customizes menus, generates a shopping list, and gives you access to more than 100 different chat boards where you're bound to find someone dealing with the same weight-loss struggles as you. "It's a real sense of community," says Susan Burke, of eDiets. "The anonymity is very freeing for people afraid of sharing their weaknesses."

JoAnn Israel has been an e-dieter for two years, losing 45 pounds. After a lifetime of struggling with her weight, Israel is finding success online thanks to around-the-clock support.

"If you have access to a computer, help is there," says Israel. "If you get a craving in the middle of the night, someone is always there to respond."

eDiets.com draws from popular diet plans, including The Zone and The Atkins Nutritional Approach. Members can choose a plan or take a test to determine which one is best for them. They can also switch plans at any time.



eDiets.com is one of many subscription weight loss sites. WebMD, the health information site, also offers a customized Weight Loss Clinic online for \$5/week (www.WebMD.com).

Meanwhile, Weight Watchers has also taken its popular Points System online (www.weightwatchers.com). If you have neither the time nor inclination to attend meetings in person, for a one-time \$30 fee, plus \$15/month, you can follow the Points System from your computer. Plug in your food choices, and it will calculate points and track pounds lost.

If you're not willing to spend to shed pounds, you can still find plenty of free diet information online. A simple Google (www.google.com) or Yahoo (www.yahoo.com) search will turn up dozens of mom-and-pop bulletin boards, online support groups, and "unofficial" sites on just about every diet out there.

But dieters, beware! The Internet is a breeding ground for "get thin quick" schemes — nutritionally bogus plans promising fast results. Remember, the same real world rule of thumb applies to dieting in cyberspace: If it seems too good to be true, it probably is. ■

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