

## Weight Management: Conservatives vs. Liberals

It was one of the first times I didn't have an answer for her. I was puzzled and found myself trying to think of an explanation, but realized it would take more than a few sentences to answer this question. "What's the difference between a Republican and a Democrat?" my daughter asked. Unprepared for the question, I answered to the best of my ability to satisfy my 11-year-old's query. I knew there was more to the answer. Still puzzled by the question hours later, I had to admit I didn't know every distinction between the two schools of thought but felt I knew the basics. As I kept thinking about the question I started questioning exercise behaviors. What makes someone a Conservative or a Liberal? Working with clients through the years I have noticed many different approaches in weight management. When focusing on weight reduction, it is how a person implements their weight loss plan that exhibits their knowledge of weight management strategies. When it comes to weight management, people typically believe in one of the two schools of thought; either Conservative or Liberal approaches.

First, one must identify what exercise behaviors make them more Conservative or Liberal. Being Conservative typically means you choose to focus most of your energy watching the budget. Conservatives are good about watching their caloric budget and don't believe in wasteful consumption. Monitoring caloric intake and choosing to focus their energy on eliminating wasteful calories, exercise Conservatives go through each food item line by line and make cuts where necessary. Unfortunately, Conservatives focus more on nutrition and creating low calorie meals placing very little (if any) focus on exercise training. Conservatives will implement various nutritional strategies (bars/shakes, switch to low-fat food items, or try the newest diet) and tend to be more finicky eaters.

Liberals are known for the "eat whatever I want as long as I exercise hard" mentality or what Conservatives call "wasteful consumption". Liberals care less about the budget and are more concerned with spending or expending calories. Their focus is exercise. "How many calories am I burning", or "what is the highest calorie exercise session I can complete," are questions the Liberal will ask. They fail to understand and implement an effective nutrition strategy which aids them in reaching their goals. Unfortunately, this mindset usually catches up with the Liberal with a change or cessation of exercise, injury, or the inevitable deceleration in metabolism that is common in a person's late 20s- mid 30s. A Liberal's downfall is focusing only on spending and not looking at consumption. Liberals need help controlling the budget by finding new nutritional strategies to see success. Shifting focus from exercise spending to focusing more on controlling consumption, Liberals will be able to make progress that may give them the results they have been searching for. Although consistent exercise is part of the plan, Liberals need to understand they could be better served and more effective if their plan included a detailed look at their diet. One of the worst ways to solve a problem is to throw more money at it. So why continue to approach weight loss by attempting to spend more?

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Again Conservatives have a different, albeit equally distressing issue. Many times they will reduce calories so severely the body has no choice but to lose weight. An advanced understanding of metabolism will tell you this type of weight loss normally will reduce muscle mass, further slowing the metabolism in the long run. This can be detrimental to the body and can be extremely frustrating after the body has adapted to “starvation mode.” Through proper nutrition and focusing on comprehensive exercise programming, a Conservative can make wonderful strides in their fitness and health. Conservatives have to loosen up on the budget and do some spending to see things flourish. Sometimes you have to spend a little for the greater good to see progress. Otherwise, those that rely on that spending will suffer; specifically your own body!

Whether you are a Conservative or Liberal, you must realize you give yourself the best chance of being successful if you commit to working “across party lines”. Neither school of thought by itself is incorrect or totally correct. Most exercisers (like politicians) believe so strongly in their position they fail to realize there is benefit in listening to and imploring strategies from the other side. As a Conservative, understand that reducing calories is only part of the overall strategy. You will be more efficient with your weight management program if you look to increase your caloric output. Spend! Spend time performing exercise that increases your heart rate and improves your fitness level. Step outside of your comfort zone of yoga or Pilates. Move toward some exercise training that has a higher caloric output. Group fitness classes or High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) may be good options for exercise training that will burn more calories. Not only will you be headed toward a caloric deficit, but eventually you will find your body craves more food as a byproduct of a faster, more active metabolism. As a Liberal it is equally important for you to work with your Conservative counterpart. You will find results could be more easily obtained if you focus on your nutrition. Conserve! Conserve calories when planning and eating meals. Conserve the time you are spending on all those exercise sessions and re-allocate that time to monitoring your food choices. Liberals obtain great results from their spending when they also control consumption.

The key to either approach is being able to balance healthy nutrition choices with consistent and moderately intense exercise. This is the best approach to weight management. As the New Year begins I challenge Conservatives and Liberals to work across the aisle more this year. Try to include the other party more in you decision making process. If you are fed up and want change, now more than ever is the time to compromise.

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