

FITNESS, DIET CENTER ALL IN ONE: LIFE-FIXING STRATEGIES

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A new local weight loss program aims to be a one-stop shop for good diet, fitness and mental health.

Feel like you've tried every diet or exercise program in town?

Now there's one more -- but this one will combine medical supervision, nutrition, fitness and behavioral counseling outside a healthcare setting.

The doctor and fitness expert behind the all-inclusive approach hope it can help people no matter what their age, health status or how much weight they need to lose.

The Center for Metabolic Health, based at the FitBody StrongBody Personal Training Studio in Oyster Point, is headed by Dr. Thomas Clark, a specialist in weight loss surgery, and Anita Pozin, the studio's owner.

The program will include medical check-ups, counseling, group classes, a monthly newsletter and weight loss aids and supplements.

The center is designed as a one-stop shop for people who have jumped from program to program in the past, Pozin said.

"A lot of people need to totally re-wire themselves," she said.

"We want to teach them how to take control of their lives without having their hands held."

A third of Americans now are classified as obese. Virginians in particular need help: A recent study found the percentage of severely overweight adults in Virginia is growing at a faster rate here than any state in the country. Hampton Roads also has landed at the top of lists ranking the fattest metropolitan areas.

The Center for Metabolic Health draws on research from the Cooper Institute in Dallas, a nonprofit organization that focuses on the connection between daily habits and health. Studies have shown even light physical activity has health benefits but that people need coaching on lifestyle skills -- how to fit exercise into hectic schedules, for example, or set realistic weight loss goals -- to succeed.

Instead, many people try weight loss plans that focus on one or two aspects of healthy living, whether it's cutting fat from meals or toning muscles, said Clark, the center's medical director. At the same time, their primary care doctors tend to be too busy to spend much time on weight loss strategies.

"People need more one-on-one time because even if you've lost weight -- even if you've had surgery -- you can easily gain it back if you don't change your behavior," he said.

Like many weight loss programs, the center's services aren't covered by health insurance.

For people who don't have a lot of money to spend, Pozin and Clark will offer a slimmed-down package -- \$150 versus the full \$500 program that can run for as long as a year -- along with some a la carte services and payment plans.

To compare, Weight Watchers charges about \$110 for 10 weeks of classes. The Dietcise program at the Riverside Wellness & Fitness Center in Newport News, a successful eight-week program run by aerobics instructors and dieticians, is \$239 for non-members.

Clark and Pozin say the \$500 plan will give people access to more specialties.

Clark, for one, will examine everyone who signs up. After a checkup that lasts about 45 minutes, he will supervise people with health concerns or who are on low-calorie diets or medicine to boost metabolism or suppress appetite.

Care will include blood work and vital sign monitoring, some of which could be covered by insurance.

Clients also will take body composition tests, learn how to use exercise equipment and study topics such as how to read food labels and interpret the federal food pyramid. They'll also have access to other experts as needed, such as a psychologist to talk about binge-eating disorders.

While success rates remain to be seen, Clark and Pozin already are plotting a move to a bigger building in the not-distant future. "There are so many medical problems that go along with being heavy," Clark said. "We want to help people fix a lot of things in their life." *

FOR INFORMATION

To learn more about the Center for Metabolic Health, call 873- 1880. The center has programs for teenagers and adults; prices vary according to individual plans. In most cases, health insurance will not cover the cost.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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Staff photo (b&w) by SANG-JIB MIN; Thomas Clark, a weight loss surgeon, and Anita Pozin have teamed up to start the Center for Metabolic Health.

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