I am having a real weight problem and would like your advice on the best diet.

Both of us are hesitant to answer this one because we struggle too. You have probably heard of all kinds of diets, and when subjected to a comparison study, much difference did not seem to exist between the Atkins (very low carbohydrates), Zone (low carbohydrates), and Ornish (very high carbohydrates, low fat) diets.

Weight loss appears to be more rapid with the Atkins diet, but a year later, things seem to be much the same among different groups.

In reality, the secret to losing weight can be summarized in two words: “Eat less.” Gimmicky dietary manipulation is not likely to have “staying” power.

Portion sizes are major problems in many parts of the world. Eating between meals is a big problem. Failure to eat with the family at the dinner table is an additional problem. Eating slowly, so as to allow a sense of satiety to kick in, is important. We know folk who can devour 2,000 calories before their stomach can signal “Enough!”

Another key point to consider is that a person has to be aware of the caloric value of foods, so as to understand the number of calories in a given treat. Chocolate bars and many other snack bars, for example, are full of calories; most ice creams are just loaded, too. Many of us like a treat, but we sometimes treat ourselves too often.

A very interesting article in The New England Journal of Medicine (October 12, 2006, p. 1563) reported a study that divided into three groups some 314 people who had lost more than 40 pounds. One group had regular face-to-face interaction with a therapist; the second had Internet interaction; the third received a quarterly newsletter. The face-to-face group kept their weight off the best. One interesting result was that daily weighing predicted better outcomes;
consequently, programs such as Weight Watchers would seem to us to be a good idea.

**Q What are your thoughts on supplements?**

**A** We are both vegetarians and consequently are aware of potential deficiencies in the vegetarian diet. In particular, we are concerned about vitamin B12, as this comes from animal sources. We strongly believe, however, that the diet is to be the main source of our nutrients.

As we have repeatedly stressed, variety and whole foods will supply most of our nutrient needs in abundance. We all need small amounts of regular sunshine for vitamin D. The vitamin B12 story means that vegetarians should take either dairy or a dairy equivalent. That “equivalent” is found only in “fortified” soy or rice “milks”—homemade varieties do not make the grade. We need to take three glasses of milk or milk equivalent a day.

The idea that supplements—particularly antioxidants—might protect against such things as cancer is attractive but not supportable with the facts.

Patients with a variety of chronic diseases have not been benefited by supplements; in fact, some have been harmed by them.

In an analysis of more than 60 randomized trials involving nearly a quarter of a million persons, vitamin supplements were tested, both singly and in combinations.

In the 47 studies with the best methodology, beta carotene, vitamin A, and vitamin E, given either singly or in combination, were associated with between a 4 to 16 percent higher mortality. Vitamin C and selenium had no effect on mortality risk.

These are relatively small risks, but they do suggest we have no basis on which to promote such supplements.

Once again, we recommend spending your money on good wholesome food rich in taste, color, and variety. God is the best nutritionist available.

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While this column is provided as a service to our readers, Drs. Landless and Handysides unfortunately cannot enter into personal and private communication with our readers. We recommend that you consult with your personal physician on all matters of your health.