

## newsbites

## Losing Weight On the Web

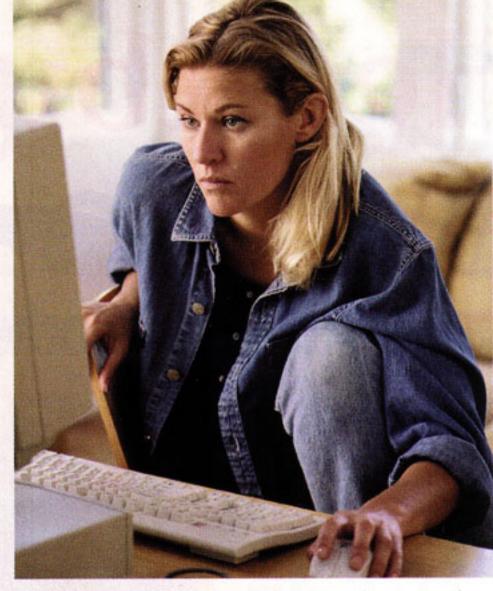
The Internet has forever changed the way we live, shop and even meet a mate. Now it's changing the way we battle the bulge, too. A slew of online diet companies are offering 24-hour support and advice from nutritionists, fitness counselors and, through chat rooms and message boards, fellow dieters.

Some of the biggest players include eDiets.com, DietWatch.com and DietSmart.com. All boast a paying customer base of more than 300,000, made up mostly of 20- to 40-year-old women who like the convenience and anonymity—no meetings to rush to, no one passing judgment on setbacks or binges.

Lisa Drayer, M.A., R.D., DietWatch's eCounseling program director, says a "warm, caring community" not only motivates her clients but keeps them coming back. Case in point: For more than a year, she has had daily chats with one client who has lost a remarkable 97 pounds. "Before coming to Diet-Watch, I was skeptical. I thought nutritional counseling could only work face-to-face. I stand corrected," she says.

Losing weight on the Web is also cheaper. Compared to conventional programs—which often require, say, a \$20 enrollment fee, \$40 a month for meetings, plus the cost of food—online fees are nominal. Most run \$10 to \$15 a month.

Merilee Kern, marketing manager for eDiets, attributes its success to the high speed of Internet communication and



affordable, personalized plans. "The Internet lets us give them what they demand: personalized diet plans, privacy and convenience," Kern says.

New members fill out a questionnaire about weight-loss goals, exercise habits and food preferences. Their answers produce a customized weekly meal plan designed to help them lose 1 to 2 pounds a week. A few services, including eDiets and DietWatch, can accommodate vegetarians.

Do they work? In a study by Brown University, Internet dieters lost an average of 9 pounds and 2.5 inches from their waist in three months. As with any weight-loss plan, however, consult your healthcare practitioner before signing up.