



ASK AN EXPERT

Accredited Practising Dietitian Savina Rego answers some questions about weight loss, what to bear in mind if you have type 2 diabetes and why helping the scales shift isn't the only use for meal replacement shakes.

Q I've got type 2 diabetes – can I use meal replacement shakes to lose weight?

A According to a few different research studies, including one published in *The Lancet* (medical journal), meal replacement shakes can not only help people living with type 2 diabetes lose weight, they can be useful when you're trying to achieve rapid weight loss, perhaps to prepare for surgery, to help alleviate joint pain or to help gain better control of your diabetes, quickly. But just as there's no one-size-fits-all approach to successful weight loss, whether meal replacement shakes are suitable for you and your diabetes

is something you should talk to your doctor, dietitian or diabetes educator about before you start using them, particularly if you plan on using them as a total meal replacement, otherwise known as a very low calorie diet (VLCD). VLCDs tend to be relatively low in carbohydrates, so your diabetes medication may need to be adjusted in order to prevent hypos.

Q I see a lot of people using protein powders and shakes to lose weight. What's the difference between these and meal replacement shakes?

A The short story is that protein shakes are designed to be used

as a diet supplement – particularly to fuel high intensity exercise and to aid the growth and repair of muscle tissue – rather than as a meal replacement. While protein shakes are, as the name suggests, rich in protein, they're not nutritionally complete. On the other hand, meal replacement shakes are designed to help people lose weight by being portion controlled as well as providing protein, fibre, healthy fats, carbohydrates and a mixture of vitamins and minerals.

Q Can I use meal replacement shakes even if I'm not trying to lose weight?

A Absolutely. You might like to use a shake to replace a meal every now and then for convenience when you need a quick meal or snack on the go; because you know it's portion controlled and nutritionally complete so it takes the hassle out of preparing something from scratch; or because – provided you choose the right shake – it's a source of high-quality protein, which can be useful to help control your hunger levels. They can also be useful for maintaining a healthy weight after weight loss, too. And I know other people even find them really useful as a way of maintaining energy and nutrients after dental surgery. ■

