

5 Ways to Reach (and Maintain!) a Healthy Weight

Diets aren't the way to go when it comes to losing weight. That's because they create temporary eating patterns — and, therefore, temporary results. Most dieters gain back any lost weight when they go back to their old eating habits.

So what's the best way to drop excess weight? Create a new normal!

Weight loss is most likely to be successful when people change their habits, replacing old, unhealthy ones with new, healthy behaviors. Here are 5 ways to make that happen:

- **Exercise.** Regular physical activity burns calories and builds muscle — both of which help you look and feel good and keep weight off. Walking the family dog, cycling to school, and doing other things that increase your daily level of activity can all make a difference. If you want to burn more calories, increase the intensity of your workout and add some strength exercises to build muscle. The more muscle you have, the more calories you burn, even when you aren't exercising.
- **Reduce screen time.** One reason people get less exercise these days is because of an increase in "screen time" — the amount of time spent watching TV, looking at the computer, or playing video games. Limit recreational screen time to less than 2 hours per day. If you're with friends at the mall, you're getting more exercise than if you're IMing them from your room.
- **Watch out for portion distortion.** Portion sizes are bigger than they used to be, and these extra calories contribute to obesity. Another key factor in weight gain is that more people drink sugary beverages, such as sodas, juice drinks, and sports drinks. So choose smaller portions (or share restaurant portions) and go for water or low-fat milk instead of soda.
- **Eat 5 servings of fruits and veggies a day.** Fruits and veggies are about more than just vitamins and minerals. They're also packed with fiber, which means they fill you up. And when you fill up on fruits and veggies, you're less likely to overeat when it comes to high-calorie foods like chips or cookies.
- **Don't skip breakfast.** Breakfast kick-starts your metabolism, burning calories from the get-go and giving you energy to do more during the day. People who skip breakfast often feel so hungry that they eat more later on. So they get more calories than they would have if they ate breakfast. In fact, people who skip breakfast tend to have higher BMIs than people who eat breakfast.

Reviewed by: Mary L. Gavin, MD

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Finding a Healthy Weight

Weight loss is a tricky topic. Lots of people are unhappy with their present weight, but most aren't sure how to change it — and many would be better off staying where they are. You may want to look like the models or actors in magazines and on TV, but those goals might not be healthy or realistic for you. Besides, no magical diet or pill will make you look like someone else.

So what should you do about weight control?

Being healthy is really about being at a weight that is right for **you**. The best way to find out if you are at a healthy weight or if you need to lose or gain weight is to talk to a doctor or dietitian, who can compare your weight with healthy norms to help you set realistic goals. If it turns out that you can benefit from weight loss, then you can follow a few of the simple suggestions listed below to get started.

Weight management is about long-term success. People who lose weight quickly by crash dieting or other extreme measures usually gain back all (and often more) of the pounds they lost because they haven't permanently changed their habits.

Tips for Success

Therefore, the best weight-management strategies are those that you can maintain for a lifetime. That's a **long** time, so we'll try to keep these suggestions as easy as possible!

Make it a family affair. Ask your mom or dad to lend help and support and to make dietary or lifestyle changes that will benefit the whole family, if possible. Teens who have the support of their families tend to have better results with their weight-management programs. But remember, you should all work together in a friendly and helpful way — making weight loss into a competition is a recipe for disaster!

Limit your drinks. It's amazing how many extra calories can be lurking in the sodas, juices, and other drinks that you take in every day. Simply cutting out a can of soda or one sports drink can save you 150 calories or more each day. Drink water or other sugar-free drinks to quench your thirst and stay away from sugary juices and sodas. Switching from whole to nonfat or low-fat milk is also a good idea.

Start small. Small changes are a lot easier to stick with than drastic ones. Try reducing the size of the portions you eat and giving up regular soda. Once you have that down, start gradually introducing healthier foods and exercise into your life.

Stop eating when you're full. Lots of people eat when they're bored, lonely, or stressed, or keep eating long after they're full out of habit. Try to pay attention as you eat and stop when you're full. Slowing down can help because it takes about 20 minutes for your brain to recognize how much is in your stomach. Sometimes taking a break before going for seconds can keep you from eating another serving.

Avoid eating when you feel upset or bored — try to find something else to do instead (a walk around the block or a trip to the gym are good alternatives). Many people find it's

helpful to keep a diary of what they eat and when. Reviewing the diary later can help them identify the emotions they have when they overeat or whether they have unhealthy habits. Your doctor or a registered dietitian can give you pointers on how to do this.

Eat less more often. Many people find that eating a couple of small snacks throughout the day helps them to make healthy choices at meals. Stick a couple of healthy snacks (carrot sticks, whole-grain pretzels, or a piece of fruit) in your backpack so that you can have one or two snacks during the day. Adding healthy snacks to your three squares and eating smaller portions when you sit down to dinner can help you to cut calories without feeling deprived.

5 a day keep the pounds away. Ditch the junk food and dig out the fruits and veggies! Five servings of fruits and veggies aren't just a good idea to help you lose weight — they'll help keep your heart and the rest of your body healthy. Other suggestions for eating well: replace white bread with whole wheat, trade your sugary sodas for water and low-fat milk, and make sure you eat a healthy breakfast. Having low-sugar, whole-grain cereal and low-fat milk with a piece of fruit is a **much** better idea than inhaling a donut as you run to the bus stop or eating no breakfast at all! A registered dietitian can give you lots of other snack and menu ideas.

More Tips

Avoid fad diets. It's never a good idea to trade meals for shakes or to give up a food group in the hope that you'll lose weight — we all need a variety of foods to stay healthy. Stay away from fad diets because you're still growing and need to make sure you get proper nutrients. Avoid diet pills (even the over-the-counter or herbal variety). They can be dangerous to your health; besides, there's no evidence that they help keep weight off over the long term.

Don't banish certain foods. Don't tell yourself you'll never again eat your absolutely favorite peanut butter chocolate ice cream or a bag of chips from the vending machine at school. Making these foods forbidden is sure to make you want them even more. Also, don't go fat free: You need to have some fat in your diet to stay healthy, so giving up all foods that have fat isn't a good idea. The key to long-term success is making healthy choices most of the time. If you want a piece of cake at a party, go for it! But munch on the carrots rather than the chips to balance it out.

Get moving. You may find that you don't need to cut calories as much as you need to get off your behind. Don't get stuck in the rut of thinking you have to play a team sport or take an aerobics class to get exercise. Try a variety of activities from hiking to cycling to dancing until you find ones you like.

Not a jock? Find other ways to fit activity into your day: walk to school, jog up and down the stairs a couple of times before your morning shower, turn off the tube and help your parents in the garden, or take a stroll past your crush's house — anything that gets you moving. Your goal should be to work up to 60 minutes of exercise every day. But everyone has to begin somewhere. It's fine to start out by simply taking a few turns around the block after school and building up your levels of fitness gradually.

Build muscle. Muscle burns more calories than fat. So adding strength training to your

exercise routine can help you reach your weight loss goals as well as give you a toned bod. And weights are not the only way to go: Try resistance bands, pilates, or push-ups to get strong. A good, well-balanced fitness routine includes aerobic workouts, strength training, and flexibility exercises.

Forgive yourself. So you were going to have one cracker with spray cheese on it and the next thing you know the can's pumping air and the box is empty? Drink some water, brush your teeth, and move on. Everyone who's ever tried to lose weight has found it challenging. When you slip up, the best idea is to get right back on track and don't look back. Avoid telling yourself that you'll get back on track tomorrow or next week or after New Year's. Start now.

Try to remember that losing weight isn't going to make you a better person — and it won't magically change your life. It's a good idea to maintain a healthy weight because it's just that: healthy.

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