

The Smart Way to Lose Weight

» Successful Strategies Are Healthy Ones

Being overweight puts you at risk for a multitude of health problems, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis and even some cancers. But you have to make sure to be healthy in your quest to drop pounds. Don't start a crash or fad diet; the best way to lose weight is to set attainable goals, eat healthy and stay active.

Read on for some tips to lose weight successfully — and wisely. And be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about your weight loss plan. He or she can help you decide what sort of plan is best for you.

Setting Realistic Goals

Many people trying to lose weight focus on just that — losing weight. This isn't the most productive outlook. Instead, focus on eating healthier and exercising more. Together these changes will lead to long-term weight loss.

To be most effective in your weight loss, set two or three goals that are specific, attainable and forgiving. For instance, a goal of walking 30 minutes a day five times a week is much better than simply naming one of your goals as "exercise more."

You can also give yourself nonfood rewards when you meet goals. The award could be physical, such as a book or article of clothing, or intangible, such as going to a movie or taking an hour of quiet time for yourself.

Eating Healthy

Calories are the amount of energy contained in food that you eat. Simply put, to lose weight you must eat fewer calories than your body uses. When you eat more calories than your body uses, the extra calories are stored in your body as fat. A pound of fat is about 3,500 calories, so to lose 1 pound in 1 week, you have to eat 3,500 fewer calories, or 500 fewer per day.

Generally, people eat three meals per day. When you want to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight, these meals should be around the same size and low in fat content. At most meals, include 1 to 2 cups of fruits and vegetables, 2 to 3 ounces of whole grains, and 1 to 2 ounces of lean meat or a meat alternative. Don't skip meals. Eating a variety of foods is best for your body, so add some new foods to your diet.

Changing your eating habits can also make it easier to eat less without still feeling hungry. For example, it takes 15 minutes or longer for your brain to know you've been fed. Eat slower so you don't overeat.

To permanently improve your eating habits, follow these three R's:

- **Reflect** on your eating habits, and find your triggers for unhealthy eating.
- **Replace** unhealthy eating habits with healthier ones.
- **Reinforce** your new habits.

Adding Physical Activity

Remember those 3,500 calories? Physical activity burns lots of them when it's done regularly and with some intensity. While most weight loss occurs because of decreased calorie intake through food, sustained physical activity is the most helpful tool for keeping weight off.

Gradually increase your exercise level. If you've been inactive, choose a low-intensity activity to start. Graduate in intensity as you become more physically fit. You can exercise at a particular time of day, or at multiple times throughout the day. Many common chores or everyday activities burn calories, such as gardening, pushing a stroller, shoveling snow or raking leaves.

Six Success Strategies

The Mayo Clinic offers six strategies for weight loss:

- 1. Make a commitment:** Losing weight and keeping it off permanently take time and effort. Make diet and exercise changes to ultimately please yourself. And try to resolve any other problems in your life. Changing your lifestyle doesn't just take physical energy — it takes mental energy, too.
- 2. Get emotional support:** Choose people who want the best for you and will encourage you; these people are your best support resources.
- 3. Set a realistic goal:** Don't forget that healthy weight loss is slow and steady. Focus on "process goals," such as the goal of walking 30 minutes a day five times a week, instead of "outcome goals," such as losing 50 pounds.
- 4. Enjoy healthier foods:** Decreasing calories doesn't mean you have to sacrifice food or taste, either.
- 5. Get active, stay active:** Dieting alone can help you lose weight, but adding and keeping physical activity in your daily routine can increase your rate of weight loss significantly.
- 6. Change your lifestyle:** Don't just exercise and eat healthy for a few weeks or months. Make these behaviors part of your lifestyle. You might have a setback, but don't give up — just start fresh the next day. Remember, you're working on a plan to change your life. **NP**

Sources include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Mayo Clinic, the American Academy of Family Physicians and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

Additional Notes:
