

Weight Management: How to Reach a Healthy Weight



If you want to get to a healthy weight and stay there, healthy lifestyle changes will work better than dieting. These three steps can help.

- **Improve your eating habits.** It's best to do this slowly. You will be more successful if you work on changing one eating habit at a time.
- **Get active.** Regular activity can help you feel better, have more energy, and burn more calories.
- **Change your thinking.** Your thoughts have a lot to do with how you feel and what you do. You'll have more success at making lifestyle changes if you first change the way you think.

Weight is only one part of your health. Even if you carry some extra weight, healthy eating and being more active can help you feel better, have more energy, and lower your risk for health problems.

Improve your eating habits

Instead of going on a diet, make healthy changes that you can stay with over time.

Healthy eating, combined with getting active, is more likely than dieting to help you reach and stay at a healthy weight. Eating a healthy variety of foods is a lot more satisfying than following a strict diet that leaves you feeling deprived and hungry.

Listen to your body

Young children are good at listening to their bodies. They eat when they're hungry and stop when they're full. But adults may ignore these signals. You may keep eating after you're full, or you may eat because you're bored or upset.

Be aware of body signals that tell you when and how much to eat:

- **Hunger** is a normal sensation that makes you want to eat. Your body tells your brain that your stomach is empty.
- **Fullness** is the feeling of being satisfied. Your stomach tells your brain that you're full.
- **Appetite** is the desire for the taste and pleasure of food.

Some things cause you to eat when you're not really hungry. If you know what these eating triggers are, you can avoid them.

Stress is a very common trigger. You can learn ways to manage stress and eating. Other common eating triggers include certain smells or sights, social situations, and emotions like boredom or loneliness.

Control your portions

The portions served in restaurants are usually much larger than what you need. Cutting back your portions can help you reach or stay at a healthy weight, without giving up your favorite foods.

Choose your food sensibly

All foods, if eaten in moderation, can be part of healthy eating. Eat a variety of foods from each food group. Include grains, vegetables, fruits,

milk, and meat and other proteins, including beans. Remember to:

- Limit foods high in fat, sugar, and calories.
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Plan your meals ahead of time. You'll be less likely to grab something convenient that's not as healthy.

Get more active

Try to make physical activity a regular, fun part of your life. Physical activity helps you burn more calories.

For weight loss, experts advise doing moderate activity for at least 5 hours a week. If you have not exercised much in the past, your doctor might first suggest a small amount of daily aerobic activity. Build up your exercise program bit by bit, and aim for 60 to 90 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week. This can help you lose weight and keep it off.

There are lots of ways to fit activity into your life.

- Walk or bike to the store.
- Walk the dog or meet a friend for a walk.
- Read a newspaper on a stationary bike.
- Mow the lawn, rake leaves, shovel snow, or do some gardening.
- Use the stairs instead of the elevator, at least for a few floors.

Talk to your doctor

Moderate physical activity is safe for most people. But it's always a good idea to talk to your doctor before becoming more active, especially if you haven't been very active or you have health problems.

Change your thinking

When you're trying to reach a healthy weight, changing how you think about certain things may help. Here are some ideas:

- Don't compare yourself to others. Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.
- Pay attention to how hungry or full you feel. When you eat, be aware of why you're eating and how much you're eating.
- Don't focus on dieting. Dieting almost never works over the long term.
- Focus on improving your health instead of dieting.

To find success at making lifestyle changes:

- **Have your own reason.** If you make changes because someone else wants you to, you're less likely to succeed.
- **Set goals.** Include long-term goals and short-term goals that you can measure easily.
- **Measure improvements to your health.** For example, keep track of your blood pressure, cholesterol, or blood sugar. Or see how you can shorten the time it takes to walk a mile.
- **Think about what might get in your way,** and prepare for those barriers.
- **Get support** from your family, your doctor, your friends—and support yourself.