

LOSING WEIGHT - HOW TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS



Why lose weight?

People who are overweight or obese are more likely to be ill. The health risks associated with overweight and obesity include type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, raised cholesterol, heart disease and cancer. Other effects include infertility, impotency, liver and gall bladder disease. Increasing weight can also take its toll on weight bearing joints, respiratory illnesses and can undermine self esteem and confidence.

What can I expect?

Even a modest weight loss of 5-10% of current weight will provide health benefits such as an improved blood lipid profile, lower blood pressure and general improvement in health and quality of life. Although some individuals can lose more, for most a modest weight loss followed by weight maintenance is more realistic.

What strategies work best?

Don't aim too high - set realistic short term goals.

Aim to lose no more than 2 - 4 lbs per month (1-2 kg).

Start with what you are eating now and identify 2 or 3 changes that you can easily make. Try keeping a diary of what you eat over a week then use this to identify key changes. For example it could be eating two extra portions of fruit and vegetables each day, starting the day with a healthy breakfast or cutting out cakes, biscuits and pastries. Work on these changes until they become well established habits. This could take a few months.

Avoid fad diets. Diets that restrict whole food groups or rely on few foods are unlikely to be healthy. There is no magic bullet for weight loss. It's all about burning up more calories than you eat.

Eat regularly. Spread your intake throughout the day by eating regular small meals and avoid heavy meals in the evening. People who eat a healthy breakfast find it easier to control their weight and tend to be slimmer. Research shows that skipping meals often results in increased snacking on the wrong things.

Get help. You are much more likely to succeed if you have the help and support of people around you. This includes family, friends, healthcare professionals (doctor, dietitian and practice nurse) and work colleagues. Some people find they really benefit from the support they get from attending a slimming group. Some slimming organisations also offer on line support. Make sure you make use of your supporters - choose a mentor and sit down with them once a week to review what has gone well, what hasn't gone well and how tackle next week's challenges.

Get active. Even if you fail to lose weight, the evidence shows that becoming more active can have significant health benefits. Work up from what you are doing now. It is generally recommended that we should be active for 30 minutes at least 5 times a week. But to lose or maintain weight experts suggest 45-60 minutes a day. Try to find activities that you can fit comfortably into your everyday routines. Make these into new habits. Remember you can break activity down into 3 or 4 fifteen minute sessions a day if it helps. Walking, cycling, gardening and dancing all count.

Identify strategies that help you. Understanding your own behaviour is key to losing weight. Think about the "triggers" that make you overeat and work to overcome them. For example if you always snack in front of the television at night, make a list of 10 other things you can do instead. This could include having a hot bath, going for a walk, reading a book, doing a jigsaw, phoning a friend, a hobby like needlework or knitting, sudoku, playing cards, DIY or clearing out a cupboard.

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Plan ahead. Try planning your meals the night before. That way you are more likely to be able to control what you eat.

Don't give up. It's easy to get discouraged by set backs. When days don't go according to plan, don't give up. Think positively and 'get back on track' right away. It's only normal to have the occasional lapse so don't let it get in the way of your overall goals.

Weight maintenance. Once you reach your target weight don't abandon your new habits as you need these to help keep your weight steady. Keep an eye on your weight and waist circumference. That way you should be able to keep your weight on track.

Changing how you eat

To lose weight you need to use up more energy (calories or kcals) than your body takes in from food and drink.

Eating a healthy diet with fewer calories combined with more physical activity achieves the best results.

The major nutrients which provide energy are carbohydrates (starchy and sugary foods), proteins, fat and alcohol. As fat and alcohol contain more calories it is especially important to limit these.

1 gram of fat = 9 calories

1 gram of carbohydrate = 4 calories

1 gram of protein = 4 calories

1 gram of alcohol = 7 calories

Trying to lose weight does not mean starving yourself. You should still enjoy and eat a variety of foods. Try making a few changes to your regular eating habits to help reduce the number of calories you eat.

Fill up on foods that are low in calories yet still satisfying:

- About a third of your food should be carbohydrate rich foods such as bread, potatoes, chapattis, pasta, rice and other cereals. These foods do not contain too many calories unless you add fat to them. Most of us eat too little fibre so where possible try to choose wholemeal or wholegrain varieties. They also contain higher levels of nutrients and are more satisfying.
- Eat plenty of vegetables, salads and fruit. At mealtimes try to cover half of your plate with vegetables. Fresh, canned, frozen and dried fruit and vegetables all count but if choosing canned fruit go for those in natural juices rather than syrup.
- Try increasing your intake of pulses, beans, peas and lentils. These are all low in calories but high in fibre so are excellent choices.

Limit foods that are high in fat (especially saturated fat), and sugar:

- If you eat meat, choose small portions of lean meat and trim off any visible fat. Chicken and turkey without the skin and white fish contain less fat than red meat so eat these more often. Oily fish is higher in calories but contains heart healthy oils so try to include modest portions at least once or twice a week.
- Processed meat (sausages, bacon, burgers etc) are all high in saturated.
- Choose half-fat and low fat dairy foods in preference to those dairy products which are high in saturated fat (butter, cheese, full cream milk and yoghurt).
- Choose a low fat spread. Look for those based on olive oil and sunflower oils.
- Limit oils in cooking by using cooking methods that don't require it. If you do use oil, keep to a minimum and choose those high in monounsaturated fats such as rapeseed and olive oil.
- Limit sweets, biscuits, cakes, chocolate, sugar and honey.
- Avoid salad dressings and sauces that are rich in oil or cream. Opt for low calorie dressings and tomato based sauces.

Drinks:

- Drink plenty. A glass of water or slimline drink before a meal may help reduce your appetite and helps keep you hydrated.
- Limit drinks high in sugar, especially fizzy and sugary drinks.
- Alcoholic drinks are high in calories but contain few nutrients so try to reduce these.
- Although considered healthy, fruit juices and smoothies can be high in calories so drink in moderate amounts.

Portion sizes:

- Keep portion sizes modest – you should be able to walk away from a meal without feeling bloated.

Where to get more information

- The British Dietetic Association has developed two free websites to help individuals manage their weight: www.bdaweightwise.com and www.teenweightwise.com
- Slimming organisations such as Weight Watchers, Slimming World and Rosemary Connelly offer support, skills and education. You can choose whether to attend meetings, join on line or by post.
- Your GP surgery may be able to offer more support and advice. For dietary advice tailored to your needs, ask your GP to refer you to a registered dietitian.