

Losing Weight Is More Than Counting Calories

In January many people make a New Year's resolution to improve their health by losing weight and/or exercising on a regular basis. However, any time of the year is a good time to reach a healthy weight and become more physically active.

Reduce Your Chances of Health Problems From Being Overweight or Obese

Americans are getting fatter and don't get enough physical activity, which can lead to premature death. Approximately two-thirds of American adults are either overweight or obese. The number of obese adults has nearly doubled since the 1980s, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Being overweight or obese makes you more likely to develop the following health problems: heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, gallbladder disease, sleep apnea and breathing problems, joint pain caused by excess uric acid (gout) and osteoarthritis. Obesity also is linked to certain types of cancer (breast, colon, endometrial, prostate and kidney).

Losing a small amount of weight, just 5 to 10 percent of your current weight, will help to lower your risk of developing weight-related health problems. It also can send obesity-associated complications (e.g. high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol) into remission and improve your overall health.

Six Quick Tips for Successful Weight Loss

The best and safest way to shed pounds and improve your health is to eat a balanced diet, cut calories modestly, and be physically active every day. When starting your program, follow these basic tips for successful weight loss.

1. Know how many calories you need to consume to maintain a healthy weight.
2. Plan your meals so you won't resort to eating unhealthy fast foods.
3. Eat recommended amounts of vegetables, fruits, lean protein and whole grains. Use MyPyramid, USDA's food guide pyramid, to choose a healthful assortment of foods, including vegetables, fruits, grains, fat-free milk, fish, lean meat, poultry and beans. To feel full with fewer calories, choose foods naturally high in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables, legumes (e.g. beans and lentils) and whole grains.
4. Drink plenty of water and fat-free milk, but stay away from high-calorie, sugary beverages.
5. Don't skip meals, especially breakfast.
6. Get plenty of physical activity every day.

When contestants on *The Biggest Loser* begin their weight loss program, most of them are lacking in these six areas, according to Cheryl Forberg, the popular TV show's registered dietitian.

Set a Realistic Goal

The first step to weight loss is to set a realistic goal. To determine what a healthy weight is for you, use a body mass index (BMI) chart. BMI, a number calculated from your weight and height, provides your body's "fatness" and is a reliable indicator of being overweight or obese, which may lead to health problems. Find out your BMI at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/>.

Lose Weight Gradually

A safe weight loss is one-half to 2 pounds per week. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans calls for a reduction of 500 calories per day to lose weight.

This can be achieved by eating fewer calories and/or by exercising to burn more calories. You can lose 5 to 10 percent of your weight by decreasing the calories eaten and increasing the calories burned by 250 to 1,000 calories per day, depending on your current calorie intake.

It is better to maintain a modest weight loss over a longer period of time than to lose a lot of weight and regain it. After you've lost 10 percent of your current body weight and have kept it off for 6 months, you can work on losing additional pounds if necessary to reach a healthy weight.

Consume Fewer Calories

Consuming fewer calories is part of a healthy eating plan to lose weight. You may be eating more than you realize, so always pay attention to portion sizes. Choose foods that are lower in total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and added sugars. Get the most nutrition from calories consumed by choosing "nutrient-dense" foods from every food group. Plan your meals and snacks to include plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

Adopt the New American Plate: According to the American Institute for Cancer Research's New American Plate, two-thirds or more of your plate should contain a variety of plant-based foods, such as whole grains, beans, fruits and vegetables. These foods are low in calories and reduce your risk of many chronic diseases and certain types of cancer.

The remaining one-third or less of your plate should contain lean protein, such as fish, lean meats, poultry, meat alternates (e.g. beans, eggs and nuts), and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. Protein takes longer to digest, so it helps you feel full and satisfied longer. It also helps curb carbohydrate cravings.

Eat Fewer Calories: Here are some ways to consume fewer calories and be less tempted to overeat.

- Take small bites, eat slowly and enjoy your food. It takes 20 minutes for your stomach to tell your brain that you're full.
- Don't skip meals, especially breakfast.
- Eat small, frequent meals. Establish a regular eating pattern, which typically means eating every three or four hours

throughout the day. Going more than six hours without food slows down your metabolism and makes you more apt to grab any food and eat too much of it.

- Don't drink your calories. Solid foods satisfy longer than liquids with the same amount of calories.
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day.
- Use a smaller plate so you think you're getting more food.
- Portion your meals at the stove instead of the table.
- Do not eat directly from a bag or box, because it's hard to judge how much you are eating.
- Pack your own healthy snacks to avoid grabbing fast food or a high-calorie, high-fat food.
- When eating out, choose regular or child-sized portions, and say "no" to super-sizing.

To make smart choices from the five food groups in USDA's latest food guide pyramid, refer to these fact sheets: [HGIC 4000, 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#); [HGIC 4010, MyPyramid](#); [HGIC 4011, MyPyramid for Kids](#) and [HGIC 4012, 30 MyPyramid Steps to a Healthier You](#).

Skip the Fad Diets

The high-protein, low-carbohydrate and cabbage soup diets are examples of fad diets. Fad diets, which are not recommended for losing weight, usually overemphasize a type of food or one particular food. This is contrary to recommendations in the federal nutrition dietary guidelines and MyPyramid (USDA's food guide pyramid), which advise eating a variety of foods every day.

Fad diets may work at first, because they cut calories. However, you can't stay on them permanently, and they may increase the risk for certain health problems (e.g. high cholesterol, heart disease, gout, kidney stones and certain cancers). Quick weight-loss diets don't work for most people.

Limit Food Portions, Fat, Protein, Sugars & Alcohol

You can enjoy all foods as part of a healthy diet as long as you limit fat (total, saturated and trans fat), protein, added sugars and alcohol. Limit portion

sizes, especially of high-calorie foods (e.g. cookies, cakes, French fries, fats, oils and spreads). Refer to [HGIC 4010, MyPyramid](#) and www.MyPyramid.gov for more information on planning daily meals and snacks.

Read Food Labels

Read the Nutrition Facts Label on food packaging. This label helps you choose nutritious foods, correct portion sizes and calories. For more food labeling information, see [HGIC 4056, Reading the New Food Labels](#).

Avoid Emotional Eating

Do not try to solve problems with food. When you are upset (e.g. bored, sad, frustrated, angry, lonely), do not reach for ice cream or brownies to solve the problem, because you may feel worse afterwards. Instead of reaching for food, do something fun, such as go for a walk, play with your kids, watch a movie or call a friend.

Get Moving

Regular physical activity is a key element in weight loss and is important for controlling weight. Time spent watching TV is the most powerful behavioral predictor of obesity. Your obesity risk increases by 25 percent for every two hours of TV viewed daily.

Sneak More Exercise Into Your Daily Routine:

Exercise is a form of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and done to improve your health or fitness level. It boosts your mood while it burns calories, yet it does not have to be strenuous to benefit you. Several short sessions of exercise throughout the day are just as effective at burning calories and improving health as one long session. For example, taking three brisk 20-minute walks (e.g. in the morning, at lunch time and in the evening) is as beneficial as taking a one-hour walk.

You gain weight if you burn fewer calories through physical activity than you consume in foods and beverages. To lose weight, increase the amount or intensity of physical activity. Take it slow and easy at first, and build up your endurance gradually while you increase your exercise time.

Here are a few ways to incorporate more physical activity in your daily routine.

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.

- Wear a pedometer to track your steps. Aim to walk at least 10,000 steps a day.
- Enjoy a brisk 15-minute walk during your lunch break.
- Walk the dog every day. He needs the exercise, too.
- Ride a bike in your neighborhood.
- Join a dance or yoga class.
- Walk up and down the sidelines during your child's soccer, baseball or football games.
- Use a push mower to mow the lawn.
- Grow a garden. You will benefit from the increased physical activity, and the fresh vegetables will be an added nutrition bonus.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. However, many adults need to do more than 30 minutes of daily moderate physical activity to maintain a healthy weight after weight loss. For most adults, 60 to 90 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity on most days brings even greater health benefits. Unless your job includes lots of vigorous physical activity, this total is in addition to usual activity at home or at work. Children should get 60 minutes of moderate physical activity on most, and preferably all, days of the week.

For more information on increasing the intensity or amount of your daily physical activity, refer to: [HGIC 4030, Physical Activity Pyramid](#), [HGIC 4031, Physical Activity for Adults](#) and [HGIC 4032, Physical Activity for Children](#). To read the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, go to www.health.gov/paguidelines/.

Boost Your Metabolism: Increase your metabolism by combining exercise with dieting to keep muscle while losing body fat. Muscle burns more calories than fat does; therefore, the more muscle you have, the faster your metabolism. On the other hand, if you go on a reduced-calorie diet without exercising, the weight you lose tends to come from both body fat and muscle.

Exercise burns calories (energy) and preserves or increases lean muscle mass. This enables you to

burn more calories even when resting. Do some strength training, such as lifting weights, working with resistance bands, doing push-ups and sit-ups or heavy gardening (e.g. shoveling or digging). Adults should do some muscle-strengthening exercises at least twice a week, according to the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.

Chronic sleep loss affects various components of metabolism that influence hunger and weight gain, making it harder to maintain or lose weight. Sleep deprivation slows down metabolism and may cause you to overeat, because you feel hungry even if you are full. You may crave foods that are high-fat, high-sugar and high-carbohydrate. Sleep loss also may increase the storage of body fat and insulin resistance. The average normal amount of sleep is 7½ hours per night, but you have to find out how much you need to feel refreshed and function well during the day. Getting the right amount of restorative deep or slow-wave sleep is just as important as getting enough total sleep.

Metabolism slows with age. After the age of 40, the average inactive person's resting metabolic rate slows down 10 percent every 10 years. Resting metabolic rate is how fast your body burns calories at rest to maintain involuntary functions (e.g. breathing, perspiring and circulating your blood).

Talk to Your Doctor Before Starting a Weight Loss Program

Consult with your doctor or health-care provider if you plan to lose more than 15 to 20 pounds, have any health problems, or take medication on a regular basis. Your doctor should monitor a very low calorie diet of less than 800 calories per day.

There is no magic pill for obesity. If you have a lot of weight to lose, a drug may be helpful to accompany a healthy eating and exercise program. However, always contact your doctor before using any weight-loss drug. He or she will decide whether prescription drug therapy is appropriate. If you are at high risk from being overweight or obese, you also should talk to your doctor about whether weight loss surgery is an option.

Change Behavior to Keep Weight Off

After you start eating a balanced diet, cutting calories and exercising daily, the challenge is to maintain these lifestyle changes. Balance the calories or energy you get from food and beverages with the calories you burn.

Plan ahead for weekends, vacations and special occasions so that you will have healthy foods on hand when your routine changes. Get support from family, friends and others to help you stay motivated. They can join you for evening walks, weekend hikes, bike rides, golf or tennis.

Dr. Rena Wing, professor of psychiatry at Brown Medical School in Providence, RI and co-developer of the National Weight Control Registry, maintains a database of weight-control information on more than 5,000 American adults. These participants have shed an average of 66-70 pounds and have kept it off for approximately 5½ years.

To keep off the weight you lose, follow the behaviors of the successful "losers" in the National Weight Control Registry.

Eat a Low-Calorie Diet With Moderate Fat Intake & Limit Fast Food Consumption:

Since the Registry began in 1995, fat intake of the successful "losers" has increased while remaining within the levels of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which recommend no more than 30 percent of daily calories from fat. On the other hand, carbohydrate intake has somewhat decreased in more recent years. Participants' consumption of consistently lower amounts of carbohydrates may be due, in part, to the popularity of the low carbohydrate diet.

Weigh Frequently to Monitor Your Progress:

You also may find that keeping a food and physical activity journal helps you track your progress and spot trends.

Be Very Physically Active an Hour or More a Day While Consuming No More Calories Than You Burn Throughout the Day:

The successful "losers" in the Registry get an average of 60 minutes of moderate physical activity per day. Many of them burn up to 2,800 calories a week on a

variety of activities. This is equivalent to walking four miles a day or 28 miles a week.

Eat Regular Meals, Including Breakfast Every Day: Eating breakfast reduces the chance of getting “over-hungry” and having the urge to overeat and snack too often later in the day. Breakfast also provides the fuel to jump start your metabolism after fasting all night.

Conclusion

There is nothing magical about losing weight. If you decide to improve your health by losing weight, it’s important to remember that it requires hard work and commitment. It takes about 6 months for a new behavior to become a lifestyle change (e.g. exercising regularly or eating more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fat-free milk products and lean protein).

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