

Weight Loss: 6 Strategies for Success

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By: Mayo Clinic Staff



Make your weight-loss goals a reality. Follow these proven strategies.

Hundreds of fad diets, weight-loss programs and outright scams promise quick and easy weight loss. However, the foundation of every successful weight-loss program remains a healthy, calorie-controlled diet combined with exercise. **For successful, long-term weight loss, you must make permanent changes in your lifestyle and health habits.**

How do you make those permanent changes? Consider following these six strategies for weight-loss success.

1. Make a commitment

Permanent weight loss takes time and effort — and a lifelong commitment. **Make sure that you're ready to make permanent changes and that you do so for the right reasons.**

To stay committed to your weight loss, you need to be focused. It takes a lot of mental and physical energy to change your habits. So as you're planning new weight-loss-related lifestyle changes, make a plan to address other stresses in your life first, such as financial problems or relationship conflicts. While these stresses may never go away completely, managing them better should improve your ability to focus on achieving a healthier lifestyle. Then, once you're ready to launch your weight-loss plan, set a start date and then — start.

2. Find your inner motivation

No one else can make you lose weight. You must undertake diet and exercise changes to please yourself. What's going to give you the burning drive to stick to your weight-loss plan? Make a list of what's important to you to help stay motivated and focused, whether it's an upcoming beach vacation or better overall health. Then find a way to make sure that you can call on your motivational factors during moments of temptation. Perhaps you want to post an encouraging note to yourself on the pantry door, for instance.

While you have to take responsibility for your own behavior for successful weight loss, it helps to have support — of the right kind. Pick people to support you who will encourage you in positive ways, without shame, embarrassment or sabotage. Ideally, find people who will listen to your concerns and feelings, spend time exercising with you or creating healthy menus, and who will share the priority you've placed on developing a healthier lifestyle. **Your support group can also offer accountability, which can be a strong motivation to stick to your weight-loss goals.** If you prefer to keep your weight-loss plans private, be accountable to yourself by having regular weigh-ins and recording your diet and exercise progress in a journal.

3. Set realistic goals

It may seem obvious to set realistic weight-loss goals. But do you really know what's realistic? **Over the long term, it's best to aim for losing 1 to 2 pounds (0.5 to 1 kilogram) a week, although initially you might lose weight more quickly than that if you make significant changes — just be sure the changes are health supporting.** To lose 1 to 2 pounds a week, you need to burn 500 to 1,000 calories more than you consume each day, through a lower calorie diet and regular exercise.

When you're setting goals, think about both process and outcome goals. "Exercise regularly" is an example of a process goal, while "Lose 30 pounds" is an example of an

outcome goal. It isn't essential that you have an outcome goal, but you should set process goals because changing your processes — your habits — is a key to weight loss. **Also make sure that your goals are SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-limited.** An example of a SMART goal is aiming to walk for 30 minutes a day, five days a week for the next three months, and logging your results.

4. Enjoy healthier foods

Adopting a new eating style that promotes weight loss must include lowering your total calorie intake. But decreasing calories need not mean giving up taste, satisfaction or even ease of meal preparation. **One way you can lower your calorie intake is by eating more plant-based foods — fruits, vegetables and whole grains.** Strive for variety to help you achieve your goals without giving up taste or nutrition.

In particular, get your weight loss started by eating a healthy breakfast every day; eating at least four servings of vegetables and three servings of fruits daily; and using healthy fats, such as olive oil, vegetable oils and nut butters. In addition, cut back on sugar, choose low-fat dairy products and keep meat consumption to a 3-ounce portion (about the size of a deck of cards).

5. Get active, stay active

The key to weight loss is burning more calories than you consume. Because 3,500 calories equals about 1 pound (0.5 kilogram) of fat, you need to burn 3,500 calories more than you take in to lose 1 pound. So if you cut 500 calories from your typical diet each day, you'd lose about 1 pound a week (500 calories x 7 days = 3,500 calories).

While you can lose weight without exercise, exercise plus calorie restriction can help give you the weight-loss edge. Exercise can help burn off the excess calories you can't cut through diet alone. Exercise also offers numerous health benefits, including boosting your mood, strengthening your cardiovascular system and reducing your blood pressure. Exercise can also help in maintaining weight loss. Studies show that people who maintain their weight loss over the long term get regular physical activity.

How many calories you burn depends on the frequency, duration and intensity of your activities. **One of the best ways to lose body fat is through steady aerobic exercise — such as brisk walking — for at least 30 minutes most days of the week.** Any

extra movement helps burn calories, though. Lifestyle activities may be easier to fit into your day. Think about ways you can increase your physical activity throughout the day if you can't fit in formal exercise on a given day. For example, make several trips up and down stairs instead of using the elevator, or park at the far end of the lot when shopping.

6. Change your perspective

It's not enough to eat healthy foods and exercise for only a few weeks or even months if you want long-term, successful weight loss. **These habits must become a way of life.** Lifestyle changes start with taking an honest look at your eating patterns and daily routine. After assessing your personal challenges to weight loss, try working out a strategy to gradually change habits and attitudes that have sabotaged your past efforts. And you have to move beyond simply recognizing your challenges — you have to plan for how you'll deal with them if you're going to succeed in losing weight once and for all.

You likely will have an occasional setback. But instead of giving up entirely after a setback, simply start fresh the next day. Remember that you're planning to change your life. It won't happen all at once. Stick to your healthy lifestyle and the results will be worth it.

Lorie Eber is a NASM Certified Personal Trainer, Gerontologist and author. Lorie Eber Wellness Coaching provides one-on-one guidance and support to clients who are ready to make permanent lifestyle changes and lead a happier, healthier life.

If you're interested in learning more about the program, email Ms. Eber at EberLorie@gmail.com, call her at (714) 357-9946, or visit her website: www.AgingBeatsTheAlternative.com.