



Weight Loss

The healthy way?

There are a variety of reasons why an individual may want to lose weight. Moderate reductions in weight may be attained by simple lifestyle modifications. Here are some tips to get you started:

1. **Start by evaluating your motives.** If your goal is health improvement, keep in mind that dieting may cause more harm than good. Weight loss and weight cycling are damaging to the body. For instance, the body does not just lose fat when dieting. Muscle loss occurs as well resulting in what appears to be a permanent decrease in metabolism. There are also many other neurobiological mechanisms fighting against you to defend the body against weight loss including changes in hormones and neuropeptides. This leads to difficulty maintaining weight loss. Research shows 90-95% of dieters regain the weight lost and upwards of 60% regain more weight. Adopting healthy, enjoyable behaviors as part of your regular routine, regardless of your weight changes, will help you accomplish your goal of health improvement.

If you want to lose weight to “look better,” be aware that intentional weight loss programs & dieting increase, not decrease, the likelihood of long term weight gain. Restrictive intake aka dieting results in food cravings which eventually lead to overeating, in turn causing feelings of guilt and failure. It’s like trying to hold your breath – your body will take over. Dieting is also the number one risk factor for developing an eating disorder. Highly restrictive diets slow metabolism making it more difficult to burn energy and lose weight. The bottom line: starvation leads to long-term weight gain, even if you lose weight at first. Learning to eat all foods in moderation and enjoy movement are positive lifestyle changes that will help you nourish your body and enjoy your experience with food.

2. **Don’t skip meals.** It may seem like skipping meals is a way to cut back calories and lose weight, but this approach usually does more harm than good. Often, because you are hungry, it leads to overeating and less healthy food choices later in the day. Also, not eating regularly (every 3 to 5 hours) may affect your concentration, mood, and energy level.
3. **Eat Mindfully.** Instead, eat mindfully by listening to your body and learning to identify and act on hunger and fullness cues. Research shows that those who eat mindfully tend to make healthy choices naturally and manage their weight better over the course of their lives. Eating mindfully will also help you identify other reasons you eat like stress or negative emotions. Find alternative ways of dealing with these emotions like a hot cup of tea, warm bath, talking with a friend, or taking a walk.
4. **Stay balanced.** Fuel your body with moderately sized meals and snacks to keep your metabolism and body functioning at its optimum potential. Beware of any diet that cuts out entire food groups, provides a laundry list of rules, or describes foods as toxic, unclean, or off limits. The body needs food from every food group to be healthy. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, fats, dairy or nondairy food sources of calcium, and protein all provide important nutrients that help the body and brain function at its best. The key concepts of balance, variety, moderation, and flexibility should represent the core of any healthy eating program. Research shows that eating mindfully, getting consistent and adequate sleep, managing stress, and maintaining adequate hydration are all essential to health and weight management.
5. **If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.** Proponents of diets often share non-evidence based solutions and use words and stories that evoke strong emotions or feelings of inadequacy. As we learned earlier, even though you may see initial weight loss from all of your new food rules, the odds are you will gain more weight back over time ultimately blaming yourself instead of the diet. Now at this higher weight, you remember that time you lost weight resulting in you becoming an ever loyal returning customer and the cycle continues. When reviewing information found in popular media or on social media about diets, it is important to take a critical view and assess the credibility of the information provided. Also, just because it worked for someone else, does not mean it will be the right diet for you. If weight loss is in your body’s best interest, expect that the changes will be slow (0.5 to 2 lbs./week) as you work on discovering eating and exercise habits that nurture and nourish you that you want to continue.
6. **Find enjoyment in moving your body.** Staying active throughout the life span is essential to health and weight maintenance. People who maintain active lifestyles find ways to move their bodies that are enjoyable. On the contrary, people who exercise to burn calories or exercise because “they have to” never experience the joy of movement and end up more stressed than when they started. These types of exercisers rarely reap the full benefits of an active lifestyle as stress contributes to unhealthy inflammation inside the body.
7. **Do what is right for you.** Take time to notice and appreciate the small changes in your body, your energy, your mood, and the confidence you gain from learning to love and care for yourself day by day. Try not to let a perceived setback get you discouraged from making better choices. We’re all human beings and we’re not supposed to get everything right all of the time. Also, don’t compare your diet with others. That prevents you from eating mindfully and often leads to shame, guilt, and a whole mess of other negative emotions that you just don’t have time for! Each individual is unique and has different needs. You do you!