

Exercise and Eat Smart to Keep the Weight Off

Exercise every day

People in the National Weight Control Registry, a group of more than 10,000 members, have lost an average of 60 pounds and kept their weight stable for up to 5 years. In order to keep their weight off, members report exercising, on average, about 1 hour per day.

The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases recommends that a person get at least 30 minutes, 5 days a week. But if you're trying to lose weight or maintain your weight, you'll need to boost your physical activity to 60 to 90 minutes a day. It will also help to chart your progress as you increase your activity level.

To begin an exercise program:

- Talk with your health care provider first and then start slowly. Begin with 10 to 30 minutes of moderately intense activity, like walking 3 days a week. Build up to 45 to 60 minutes on most days.
- Schedule your physical activity a week in advance, use a diary to record the actual time you exercise, and try to set aside a regular time of the day for exercise if possible.

Eat smart

Most successful dieters make changes in what, when, and how much they eat. The American Heart Association recommends following these healthy eating habits:

- **Eat reasonable portions.** Studies show most Americans eat food portions 2 or 3 times larger than necessary for good nutrition and weight maintenance. To restrict your portion sizes, use a salad plate instead of a dinner plate when dining at home. When dining out, split an entrée with a dining companion or order appetizer plates instead of full meals.
- **Eat breakfast.** People who eat breakfast eat fewer calories throughout the day and are less likely to overdo because of hunger at lunch or dinner.
- **Shop smart.** Stock up on fresh, low-fat foods. Use a shopping list, and don't shop when you're hungry.
- **Plan all your meals.** When you're going to a party or out to eat, decide ahead of time what you can do to make it easier to eat healthy.
- **Manage cravings.** When you really crave a high-calorie food, eat a small amount of it, instead of resisting until you give in and eat too much.

- **Eat slowly.** Taking your time and enjoying each bite makes meals and the food you eat more satisfying, so you are likely to eat less.
- **Maintain motivation.** Keeping your motivation up is an important part of making any change permanent. Try the following strategies if your effort starts to sag:
- **Weigh yourself regularly.** Doing so is an excellent way to keep your target goal — maintaining your weight — in front of you. Weekly (not daily) weigh-ins are best and allow you to take action, by cutting calories, exercising more, or both, if your weight creeps up to three pounds over your maintenance target.
- **Cut yourself some slack.** A lapse is a small mistake or a temporary return to old habits. This can happen when you have a bad day and overeat or don't exercise. A relapse is when you go back to old habits for several days or weeks. Remember, having a lapse or relapse isn't necessarily failing. Don't give up, but do get back on track.
- **Avoid emotional eating.** Try to use other ways to respond to life's stresses besides eating. Take a walk, start a new hobby, or calm yourself through meditation.

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