

Create a path to a healthy weight

Read below to learn about creating a plan to work toward a healthy weight.

Benefits of a healthy weight:

Maintaining a healthy weight isn't just about looking slim or fitting into your favorite pair of jeans.

According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, it helps reduce the risk of:¹

- Heart disease
- Breathing problems
- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Cancer

But that's not all: Keeping a healthy weight may help you feel good about yourself and may give you the energy you need to enjoy life.

Five sneaky causes of weight gain:

1 Distorted portions

Since the 1950s, portion sizes have been increasing—and so have waistlines. People consistently eat more food when they are offered larger portions.² Keep in mind: Serving size and portions are not the same.

- A serving size is a measured amount of food that is recommended to the person eating the food.
- A portion is the amount of food you choose to eat at any one time, which can easily be more or less than the recommended serving.

What foods do you have trouble following the appropriate portion size?



2 An unhealthy stress response

Stress is your body's response to something that disrupts your routine—and it can be the perfect breeding ground for weight gain.

It triggers the “fight-or-flight” response, which causes the release of two hormones (adrenaline and cortisol). According to research published by Obesity, there's a link between high cortisol levels and being overweight.³



Remember: You may also find it harder to eat healthy when you're feeling stressed.⁴

To better help manage stress, practice the four A's:

- Avoid the people or situations that cause stress.
- Alter the situation by doing things differently to lessen the stress.
- Adapt your response by turning negative thoughts into positive ones.
- Accept the things (and people) you cannot change.

3 Mindless eating

Mindless eating is eating without paying attention—and it may cause you to eat more.⁵

When you eat mindlessly, you likely aren't listening to your body's cues to tell you if you are hungry or full. You aren't focusing on your meal to get full enjoyment out of your food.

Mindful eating encourages you to slow down, pay attention to your food and follow hunger cues.

Follow these tips to eat more mindfully:

- Eat at the table and turn off distractions so you can focus on your food.
- Don't eat directly from a package; instead, portion food into a small dish.
- Slow down and savor your food, paying attention to your hunger and fullness cues.

4 Lack of sleep

While you're sleeping, your body is also releasing hormones that control appetite, metabolism and the processing of our body's main fuel source, glucose.



Not getting enough sleep affects your hunger hormones, which can make you hungrier throughout the day.⁶

Getting the right amount of sleep helps you make healthy choices. When you get enough sleep, you are more likely to make healthy foods choices, and it gives you more energy to be physically active.⁷

Practice good sleep hygiene by:

- Sticking to a regular schedule
- Creating a wind-down routine before bed
- Avoiding: long naps, caffeine, and alcohol close to bedtime

5 Not getting enough exercise

According to the Harvard School of Public Health, exercise has many benefits for your body and mind, including weight control. When you don't get enough, it may lead to weight gain.⁸

Make a plan



Set your goals and make a plan. Before you start your weight loss journey, consider what you want to do and how you'll do it. Think about outcome and process goals you'd like to accomplish.

Examples of outcome goals	Examples of process goals
Lose 5% of my current weight	Walk 30 minutes per day, five days per week
Fit into my favorite pair of jeans/pants	Cut all added sugar for a month
Lower my blood pressure and cholesterol	Eat five servings of fruits and vegetables per day

When creating your outcome and process goals, remember to keep them SMART:

- **Specific:** Define your goal as much as possible.
- **Measurable:** Can you track your progress and measure success?
- **Achievable:** Your goal should be realistic and reasonable.
- **Relevant:** Is your goal consistent with what's important to you?
- **Time bound:** Your goal should have a time limit.



Focus on portions. Practicing portion control doesn't have to be complicated. Consider using the eyeball method to compare food on your plate with another common visual reference.⁹



A serving of meat is about three ounces, roughly the size of a deck of cards.



A serving of cooked rice or pasta should be about the size of a tennis ball.



A serving of a snack like chips or pretzels, as well as a medium piece of fruit is also the size of a tennis ball.



One cup of chopped raw fruits or vegetables is about the size of a baseball.



One serving of peanut butter is about the size of a golf ball.



A serving of cheese is one ounce, or the size of four dice.



Focus on mindful eating.

- Get rid of distractions like the television or smartphones.
- Slow down and savor by using all your senses, taking small bites, and chewing slowly.
- Show gratitude for your food.
- Do frequent check-ins and stop eating when you're satisfied, not stuffed.

How can you focus on mindfulness when eating?



Don't dwell on slip-ups and stay flexible. Pitfalls are inevitable. It's important to prepare yourself for obstacles. These tips may help:

- **Don't go into a downward spiral if your healthy habits get derailed.** One setback won't undo all the hard work you've put in. Just make sure you get back on track the next day.
- **Use slip-ups and pitfalls as a learning experience.** Try to understand the "why" behind the slip and do your best to learn from it.
- **Adjust your plan to prevent future slip-ups.** Think about how you could have handled the situation differently and change your plan if you need to.
- **Enjoy the process.** Weight loss doesn't have to be a chore. Having a positive attitude can help pave the way to happiness and success.

What's one barrier that may come up when setting goals and how do you plan on overcoming it?

What is one SMART goal you can set today?

Notes

Sources

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