

Losing Weight the Healthy Way

Set realistic goals

Talk to a dietitian or a health care provider about your ideal body weight. This will allow you to work towards a goal that is realistic for your body type. Initial success should be measured by changes in dietary behavior and not just weight loss. Weight loss should be gradual and dependent on healthy eating habits in the long term. Reducing your calories or increasing calories used by 500 will lead to a weight loss of 1½ -2 lb. weight loss per week. If you plan to lose more than 15 to 20 pounds, have any health problems, or take medication on a regular basis, see your health care professional before you begin a weight-loss program. A good goal should be short, measurable, and realistic.

Eat your breakfast!

Studies have shown that individuals who have successfully lost weight and kept it off eat a low-calorie, low-fat diet and consistently eat their breakfast. Eating more calories than needed will lead to weight due to energy imbalance. Skipping breakfast and having a small lunch increases the likelihood of consuming higher calorie meals later in the day. Think of weight loss in terms of permanently changing your eating habits. Small changes in your diet can make a big difference. These changes could include replacing whole milk with skim milk or even simply taking the time to have breakfast in the morning.

Eat your fiber!

Weight loss requires cutting down calories. There are many ways of doing this without starving yourself. The high fiber content of many foods can help you to feel full with fewer calories. Use the new and improved food pyramid (www.mypyramid.gov) to choose a healthful assortment of foods. Include bright-colored (red, yellow, green, and orange) vegetables and fruits, grains (especially whole grains). Choose foods naturally high in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables, legumes (such as beans and lentils), and whole grains. To be sure that a food is whole grain, check the ingredient list on the food label. The first ingredient should be whole wheat, whole grain, or oat. Fiber-rich diets have also been associated with reduced risk for certain cancers.

Use the food label

The nutrition facts food label can be found on the back of almost all processed foods. Use the food label to determine how many calories you are consuming and where they are coming from. Remember to look at the serving size recommended when estimating total calories. Foods such as nuts, chips, dips, and spreads have a lot more calories per serving size than most other items. Some packaged items such as noodles and soft drinks are listed as 2 to 3 serving sizes which means that eating the whole packet will add twice or three times the calories per serving size. High amounts of total fat, saturated fat, trans-fat, cholesterol, or sodium may increase your risk for chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. The food label also has nutrients you should look to add to your diet. These include iron, calcium, vitamins, and dietary fiber. Talk to your dietitian to find out which food groups your calories should come from.

Watch your beverages and sweets

Limit your use of beverages and foods that are high in added sugars. Beverages high in added sugars are often high in calories and provide little nutritional value. A food high in added sugars will list a sugar as the first or second ingredient on the ingredient list. These include non-diet soft drinks, fruit drinks, candies, cakes and cookies. These also include sweetened beverages like Gatorade® and sweet tea. Blended beverages from your favorite coffee shop are often loaded with calories especially from fat and sugar. Alcoholic beverages are also very high in calories. If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation (no more than one drink a day for women, and no more than two drinks a day for men). A 12 oz. regular beer contains about 150 calories, a 5 oz. glass of wine about 100 calories, and 1.5 oz. of 80-proof distilled spirits about 100 calories.

Keep a food diary

Keeping a food diary can be very useful in your weight loss plan. One study that followed more than 2000 people found that writing in a food diary was the most important factor in losing weight. Further more, the number of pounds lost was directly related to the number of days recorded. A food diary can also provide a large amount of self-awareness by identifying emotions and behaviors that trigger overeating. Items to include in your diary are time of day, portion size, calories, calories from fat, and your feelings before and after eating. Including any physical activity is also a good idea.

You should also take the time to reflect on your diary at a later time to understand why you ate especially between meals. Food diaries are not too difficult to keep nowadays. There are numerous websites that allow you to store your diet information and some will even analyze it for you. You can also print out food journals and keep track of your diet by writing it down. Keeping a diary also helps your dietitian better assess your diet.

Eat regularly

Skipping meals can often lead to cravings for high calorie foods. People who skip meals are shown to have higher intake of calories compared to those who eat regularly. Make an effort to eat every 3-5 hours and include three meals a day with a snack between meals (2-3 snacks/day). Establish a set meal time so you can sit down for breakfast, lunch, and dinner each day. Cooking in bulk and refrigerating your food into moderate portions can provide you meals on days you don't feel like cooking. Plan your grocery list around nutritious snacks like high fiber cereals, whole grain crackers, and fresh fruits. Eating regularly keeps your mind and body active through the day and even helps you lose weight without starving yourself.

Exercise regularly

A healthy eating plan will be twice as effective if combined with a moderate exercise routine. In order for exercise to be helpful in weight loss, you should strive for a minimum of five 30 minute sessions per week. Recent research has also shown that three 10 minute sessions in a day are as good as one 30 minute session. Try walking with a friend, joining an intramural sports league, or classes at your local gym. Take the time to try different activities to discover what you like. Regular exercise also has positive effects on your blood cholesterol and blood pressure.

References

Streit, K. J., Stevens, N H, Stevens, V J, & Rossner, J. (Feb 1991). Food records: a predictor and modifier of weight change in a long-term weight loss program. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 91, n2. p.213(4).

FDA. How to lose and manage weight. Available at: www.fda.gov/loseweight/ Retrieved on 10-22-08

USDA. Food and Nutrition information Center. Available at: <http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/> Retrieved on 10-22-08

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: <http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu>