

Healthy Steps for Healthy Weight Loss and Maintenance

Has your belt moved a notch when you weren't looking? Is holiday cheer showing on your waistline? Have all your clothes suddenly "shrunk?" Are you 10-15 pounds or more heavier than you'd like to be?

You're not alone if this describes you – and like many Arkansans anxious to look their best, you are probably desperate to try just about anything to shrink your waistline – **fast**.

Here is the bad news. There are a lot of fad diets in circulation that promise rapid weight loss, frequently by overemphasizing one particular food or type of food, pills, or machines.

Don't be fooled. Be wary of misleading programs that offer quick weight loss. Some famous phrases like, "**Eat all you want and still lose weight,**" or "**Melt fat away--while you sleep,**" may come to mind. Some other phrases to be wary of are:

- **Breakthrough**
- **Easy**
- **Effortless**
- **Fast Guaranteed**
- **Magical**
- **Quick**
- **New**
- **Discovery**
- **Immediate**
- **Miracle Cure**

There are lots of reasons for people who are overweight or obese to lose weight:

- To be healthier
- To look better
- To feel better
- To have more energy

No matter what the reason, successful weight loss and healthy weight management depend on sensible goals and expectations. If you set sensible goals for yourself, chances are you'll be more likely to meet them and have a better chance of keeping the weight off. In fact, losing even five to 10 percent of your weight is the kind of goal that can help improve your health.

Most overweight people should lose weight gradually. For safe and healthy weight loss, try not to exceed a rate of two pounds per week. Sometimes, people with serious health problems associated with obesity may have legitimate reasons for losing weight rapidly. If so, a physician's supervision is required.

What you weigh is the result of several factors:

- how much and what kinds of food you eat
- whether your lifestyle includes regular physical activity
- whether you use food to respond to stress and other situations in your life
- your physiologic and genetic make-up
- your age and health status

Successful weight loss and weight management should address all of these factors. And that's the reason to ignore products and programs that promise quick and easy results, or that promise permanent results without permanent changes in your lifestyle. Any ad that says you can lose weight without lowering the calories you take in and/or increasing your physical activity is selling fantasy and false hope. In fact, some people would call it fraud. Furthermore, the use of some products may not be safe.

A Realistic Approach

Many people who are overweight or obese have decided not to diet per se, but to concentrate on engaging in regular physical activity and maintaining healthy eating habits in accordance with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, emphasizing lowered fat consumption, and an increase in vegetables, fruits and whole grains. Others - who try to diet - report needing help to achieve their weight management goals.

Fad diets that ignore the principles of the Dietary Guidelines may result in short term weight loss, but may do so at the risk of your health. How *you* go about managing your weight has a lot to do with your long-term success. Unless your health is seriously at risk due to complications from being overweight or obese, gradual weight loss should be your rule and your goal.

Here's how to do it:

- Check with your doctor. Make sure that your health status allows lowering your caloric intake and increasing your physical activity.
- Follow a calorie-reduced, but balanced diet that provides for as little as one or two pounds of weight loss a week. Be sure to include at least five servings a day of fruits and vegetables, along with whole grains, lean meat and low fat dairy products. It may not produce headlines, but it can reduce waistlines. It's not "miracle" science - just common sense. Most important, it's prudent and healthy.
- Make time in your day for some form of physical activity. Start by taking the stairs at work, walking up or down an escalator, parking at the far end of a lot instead of cruising around for the closest spot. Then, assuming your physician gives the okay, gradually add some form of regular physical activity that you enjoy. Walking is an excellent form of physical activity that almost everyone can do.
- Consider the benefits of moderate weight loss. There's scientific evidence that losing five to 10 percent of your weight and keeping it off can benefit your health - lower your blood pressure, for example. If you are 5 feet 6 inches tall and weigh 180 pounds, and your goal weight is 150, losing five to 10 percent (nine to 18 pounds) is beneficial. When it comes to successful weight loss and weight management, steady and slow can be the way to go.

For many people who are overweight or obese, long-term - and healthy - weight management generally requires sensible goals and a commitment to make realistic changes in their lifestyle and improve their health. A lifestyle based on healthy eating and regular physical activity can be a real lifesaver.

Choosing a weight-loss program may be a difficult task. You may not know what to look for in a weight-loss program or what questions to ask.

Experts agree that the best way to reach a healthy weight is to follow a sensible eating plan and engage in regular physical activity. Weight-loss programs should encourage healthy behaviors that help you lose weight and that you can maintain over time. Safe and effective weight-loss programs should include:

- Healthy eating plans that reduce calories but do not rule out specific foods or food groups
- Regular physical activity and/or exercise instruction
- Tips on healthy behavior changes that also consider your cultural needs
- Slow and steady weight loss of about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 2 pounds per week and not more than 3 pounds per week (weight loss may be faster at the start of a program)
- Medical care if you are planning to lose weight by following a special formula diet, such as a very-low-calorie diet
- A plan to keep the weight off after you have lost it

Simple Steps for a Healthy Weight

1. Keep a record.

The first step to a healthy weight is to keep a record. Study after study has confirmed the benefits of keeping track of the food you eat and the activity you do. That's why every successful weight management program suggests that you keep a food diary and/or an activity log.

Your personal nutrition and fitness record can be simple, or detailed, whatever works for you. The simplest record is to keep track of one or two things on a regular calendar. For example, you could keep track of what you eat for breakfast and the number of minutes you walk.

Some people like to keep more detailed food and activity records. Several different formats can be downloaded free from the Internet, like one from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's Healthy Weight Program at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/diary.htm

2. Create a routine.

Humans are creatures of habit. We develop routine, standard ways of living our lives, and then we stick to them for many years. Establishing healthy routines is actually easier than you might think.

Regular routines, for eating and activity, are especially important for young children. Kids thrive on a healthy routine of meals, snacks, and active play. Establishing early, healthy patterns is a simple way to prevent eating and weight problems later in life.

Small children do need to eat more frequently than adults. However, unstructured grazing on snack foods means that kids will not be hungry, or interested, when dinner time rolls around. A healthy routine, like a nourishing mid-afternoon snack, helps kids come to the table with a healthy appetite and attitude.

The world is full of appealing, high-calorie foods – everywhere from the gas station to the mall. Without an alternative, it's easy to eat and drink things just because they are there. Making it routine to carry some healthy snacks, like string cheese or trail mix, helps you resist temptation – and it saves money too!

Developing healthy routines isn't difficult. In fact, there are many simple steps that families can take to establish healthy habits. Since we tend to eat or drink the first thing we find, making it routine to have cut-up fruit in the fridge makes it easy to snack smarter. Having milk and a pitcher of cold water on the top shelf makes it easy to choose a healthful beverage instead of a soft drink.

Making physical activity routine is important too. Children naturally love to move their bodies. Turn off the TV – and take a few minutes every day to play with your kids. If the weather is nice, take a walk outside. If it's cold or rainy, turn on the music and dance in the house.

3. Food Balance.

When it comes to dieting and weight loss, Americans tend to go to extremes. Ten years ago everything was low-fat and non-fat. Today we're going crazy for anything with a low-carb label.

A healthy lifestyle is all about balance. Diet fads tend to be unbalanced. They focus on rapid weight loss and forget about long-term health. They eliminate entire food groups and forget about physical activity.

There are several problems with America's current 'carbo-phobia' (fear of carbohydrates). One problem is that people eliminate grains, fruits, vegetables, and dairy foods, just because they contain some carbs. When dieters restrict these nutrient-rich foods, they skimp on the fiber, phytonutrients, and calcium that help prevent heart disease, cancer, and osteoporosis.

Another problem is that low-carb dieters often eat unhealthy amounts of fat. Eating lots of fat, especially saturated fat, can increase your blood cholesterol and risk of a heart attack. Pork rinds and diet chocolate may be low-carb snacks, but that doesn't mean that they are good for you. The labeling of low-carb foods is also problematic. There are no legal definitions for low-carb or terms like 'net carbs' and 'effective carbs.' Many low-

carb products, like beer and chocolate bars, have the same calories (or more) than the ‘regular’ version – almost always at a much higher cost. Nutrition experts agree that it’s important to choose carbs wisely. In fact, some aspects of the ‘new’ low-carb lifestyle have been part of every nutritionist’s mantra for years. Eating breakfast, adding protein to snacks, and cutting back on sugar and soft drinks are smart steps in any healthy eating plan.

Choose your carbs, and all your calories, by their nutrient content. For optimal health, enjoy at least three whole grains and five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables every day. For a healthy weight, cut back on empty calories – and get moving.

4. Take a daily dose of moderation.

The amount of food in front of us has a big effect on how much we eat. Studies show that kids and adults eat 25 to 50 percent more food when served large portions. Bigger servings make us eat faster, take bigger bites, and consume more calories.

Large serving sizes are just one of the many reasons why we eat and drink more than we think. The size of dishes and glasses also affects how much we consume. Children and adults pour more (and drink more) when they use shorter, wider glasses rather than taller, skinnier ones.

Another problem is the large size of food packages – especially snack packages like bags of chips and boxes of candy. When people eat straight out of the package, they eat more than they think. An easy way to enjoy food in moderation is to never eat out of the bag. Take a small portion, put it in a small bowl, and put the bag away. Food that is out of sight is out of mind.

Moderation is also important in other aspects of family life – like the amount of time we spend watching TV, playing video games, and working on the computer. Turning off the TV and choosing “screen time” carefully gives families more time to enjoy each other and more time to be active.

Simple changes, like choosing smaller snack portions and less TV time, can make a big difference in your family’s health and happiness. There is a direct connection between our TV habits and our eating habits. The average American child will see 40,000 TV food ads per year, mostly for high-fat, high-sugar items. Turning off the TV means your child will see fewer ads and may do less whining to get those foods.

5. Enjoy variety every day.

Are you bored with your eating habits? Does it seem like you eat the same old things meal after meal? Have you ever thought about how many different foods you eat in a day? Some experts recommend eating as many as 30 different foods in a day for healthy diet.

If you’re in a nutrition rut, there are plenty of healthy reasons to expand the variety of foods you eat. Studies show that people with the longest life expectancies, like the

Greeks and the Japanese, eat small amounts of many different foods. Of course, they eat many different whole foods (like fish, fruits, vegetables, and legumes), rather than lots of different chips, candy, snacks, and soft drinks.

The best reason to focus on variety is to get all the nutrients your body requires for optimal health. No one food, or food group, has everything you need, like over 40 essential vitamins and minerals, protein, fiber, and a growing list of disease-fighting antioxidants. Scientists have identified over 600 important compounds in the food we eat and they regularly discover new ones.

Supplements are no substitute for eating a variety of foods. First, pills only contain a handful of known nutrients. Many nutrients are also better absorbed from food than from supplements. Whole foods have the added benefit of natural nutrient “bundles” – groups of nutrients that come together in food and work together in your body. For example, protein, iron, and zinc for muscles are found in lean beef; protein, calcium, magnesium, and phosphorus for bones come together in dairy foods.

6. Take time for health every day – at home.

There are three simple steps to healthy food at home – planning, shopping, and making nutrition easy. Each one takes just a little bit of time, especially if you let everyone help just a little bit.

The first and most important step is planning. Taking just half an hour to plan your family’s food for a week can save you time and money. You can plan specific menus for specific nights or just make certain that you have all the basic ingredients in your fridge and cupboards.

If you’re concerned about your health, make sure that your shopping list includes low-fat dairy products. Recent research confirms that eating at least three dairy foods per day does more than build strong bones and beautiful teeth. People who consume milk, cheese, and yogurt – and get plenty of physical activity – are more likely to enjoy a healthy weight, lower body fat, and normal blood pressure.

Once you have made a plan and a list, the next step is shopping. The best tips for smart shopping have been around for a while, but they are tried and true - Never go grocery shopping when you are hungry – and make most of your purchases from the outer perimeter of the store. Your best nutrition buys are always the whole foods in the produce, dairy, meat, and bread departments.

Surveys show that home-cooked meals, even simple ones, provide more nutrients for less money.

The third step to eating well at home is to make it as easy as possible. A whole melon may go uneaten, but a cantaloupe cut into bite-size pieces will disappear quickly. Having

a bag of grated cheese in the fridge makes it easy to sprinkle some in a salad or to make a microwave quesadilla.

7. Take time for health every day – at work.

Think for just a minute about your typical workday. For many Americans, work means hours of sitting, lots of stress, rushed or skipped meals, and plenty of high-fat, high-sugar snacks and drinks.

Fitting fitness and nutrition into your workday can make a big difference in your performance, attitude, and health. With a few simple steps, you'll eat smarter and move more – wherever you work. Introduce a few of these ideas in your workplace and you'll be very popular with your co-workers.

Breakfast is a great place to start. Eating breakfast, especially one with long-lasting protein, can boost morning brainpower – and help you resist the temptations of all those donuts and mega-muffins.

If you don't have time to eat breakfast at home, skip the drive-thru and enjoy a smart "desk-fast." Breakfast at work can be as simple as a lean deli meat and cheese roll-up. Keep sliced lean deli meat and cheese in the office fridge and just roll a couple of slices together. Other tasty, quick choices include a peanut butter sandwich on whole wheat or a carton of low-fat yogurt with a piece of fruit.

Leftovers and salads-in-the-bag are another perfect lunchtime combo. Start with your favorite salad mixture. Top the leafy greens with leftover taco meat, sliced steak, or pieces of grilled chicken or fish. Tasty, healthy, and a lot less expensive than a fast food salad!

It's easy to introduce power calories into an office candy jar or snack box. Think beef jerky, nuts, trail mix, or fresh, dried, and single-serving canned fruit.

When you're aiming for a healthy weight, physical activity is a must. Fortunately there are many fun, easy ways to fit fitness into a workday. One of the simplest is to replace a coffee break with a 10-minute walk. Even a short walk will burn calories, relieve stress, and enhance memory.

8. Take time for health every day – on vacation.

It's vacation time – time for millions of Arkansas families to hit the highways or fly through an airport in search of holiday excitement. It's also a wonderful time to enjoy fun, outdoor activity – and to get physical anywhere from your neighborhood park to a faraway wilderness area.

Taking time for physical activity can make a good vacation even better. Participating in outdoor activities gives families a sense of accomplishment, an escape from life's pressures, and a chance to connect with each other. Plus, you can get fit and healthy at the same time!

Some families plan their whole vacation around outdoor activities. Multi-day hikes, bike rides, and river trips can be exciting adventures – whether you plan them yourself or go with a guide. Since strenuous vacations demand a certain level of fitness, getting in shape for trips like these also provides months of physical activity opportunities at home.

However, you don't have to be a fitness fanatic to enjoy outdoor fun. All you have to do is fit some physical activity into every vacation day. If you're on a family road trip, check the map for interesting sites to explore on foot. Give each family member a chance to choose the activity of the day. County, state, and national parks are all great places to take a walk or short hike.

Urban locations also provide plenty of paths to healthy outdoor activities. Today, many cities and towns have scenic trails for walking and pedaling. In some parks, you can rent bikes, rollerblades, or even people-powered surreys with fringes on the top. Lakes, rivers, and canals have become popular destinations as well. At these, you can often rent canoes, kayaks, rafts, inner tubes, and paddle boats.

The easiest way to be active on vacation is make it fun. Even a highway rest area can add a few minutes of outdoor fun. All you need is a Frisbee for the kids and a ball for the dog.

9. Take time for health every day – at school.

Lunch at school is important for two main reasons. A mid-day meal provides brain food that kids need for afternoon classes and homework. A healthy lunch also helps maintain a strong body for after-school athletics and activities like dance and music lessons.

Meals funded by USDA's Child Nutrition Programs, including breakfast and lunch, must meet specific guidelines for menu balance and fat content. School lunches served in kid-sized portions are nutritious and appealing. A May 2004 study showed that kids who eat school lunch consume 29 percent fewer calories from fat and twice as many fruits and vegetables than kids who eat a typical bag lunch.

Families can also create lunchbox makeovers at home – packing fun, nutritious meals for optimal performance. All it takes is five items: a fruit, a veggie, a whole grain, a protein, and a dairy food. It's as easy as a lean turkey sandwich on whole wheat with lettuce and tomato, a single-serve cup of canned fruit, and a carton of low-fat milk purchased at school. You can also cover the nutrition bases with peanut butter on crackers or rice cakes, string cheese, baby carrots, and a box of 100% juice.

10. Exercise.

When you exercise regularly food energy can be used for the activity rather than stored as fat. Research shows even moderate physical activity produces healthful benefits. Walking, bicycling, and light jogging are exercise that prepares the heart and lungs to work more efficiently. Activities that strengthen muscles help build and maintain lean body mass which produces a lean, trim look.

Exercise boosts your morale. People who are active feel good about themselves. Rather than stimulate appetite, exercise helps to regulate appetite so that it matches energy needs.

To increase your physical activity, determine how active you are now. Identify times of the day when you could add more exercise. Even parking farther out in a parking lot as you go to work or do your shopping increases activity. Squeeze in walks during lunch hours or after an evening meal. If you've been a non-exerciser until now, start gently and slowly. "No pain, no gain" doesn't apply here. It's most important that you enjoy your chosen activity so you will continue to do it.

Exercise for weight management is good at all ages in life. Establishing an exercise habit should begin in childhood but if you haven't had the habit until now, there are still benefits to be received.

11. Talk positively to yourself.

Too often we compare our own body sizes and shapes to others, forgetting that their life circumstances are different from our own. Positive self-talk allows us to identify aspects of ourselves that we like and appreciate. When you focus on your likable traits and grow to appreciate them you will have less time to belittle personal characteristics that really don't affect your self worth anyway. Positive self talk encourages positive thinking and positive actions.

12. Set goals.

Charting a course for yourself by defining the direction in which you will head is a key to success in many phases of life. Set small, achievable goals. Work hard on one or two goals at a time. Once achieved, move to the next goal step. Goals that require you to take action are best.

Examples:

- This week, I will purchase 1% milk for my family rather than whole milk.
- This week, I will use my noon hour at least three times to walk for 15 minutes each time.
- I will prepare a low fat main dish for myself and my family at least once this week.
- I will record my food intake at meals and snacks this week.

Give yourself a reward when you achieve a goal or do something that has required effort. Rewards can be small gifts to yourself, allowing special times for yourself or with others, or going to special events. The important point is to let rewards serve as a reminder that you have been successful. Rewards are best when they closely follow your accomplishment.

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