

## Fitness & Nutrition

### Eight Keys to Losing Weight

Is it really possible to lose weight and keep it off? Absolutely. Almost everyone who is a bit overweight can safely maintain a 10- to 20- pound weight loss, and some obese people can trim hundreds of pounds. In fact, in a recent study of successful "losers" -- people who lost an average of 66 pounds and kept the weight off for at least five years - researchers found that even people with the most stubborn weight problems, including yo-yo dieters and those who had been fat since childhood, were able to slim down.

What's the secret? It's no secret, really. Everyone knows what to do : To lose weight, you just have to burn more calories each day than you take in. What's exciting is that both researchers and successful dieters are beginning to figure out how to do it. Here's how you can, too:

#### 1. Make a commitment.

Making a firm commitment is a critical first step toward successful weight loss, says Miriam Nelson, Ph.D., associate chief of the human physiology laboratory at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Research Center on Aging at Tufts University and author of the best-selling book *Strong Women Stay Slim*. Take advantage of the interest you have in losing weight today, she says. Don't say, "I'll start after the holidays," or "One of these days I'll be ready." Buy new exercise shoes and weights, take a walk, plan this week's meals and make a shopping list today.

#### 2. Set realistic goals.

Losing one pound a week -- and keeping it off -- with sensible eating and exercise is probably a sensible goal. Dropping three dress or suit sizes in eight weeks isn't. One way to figure out how many calories you can eat and still lose weight is to keep a food diary for a week and figure out how many calories you're consuming now. Then create a food plan that provides about 500 calories per day less than you're eating now. As long as you're also exercising, you'll lose about one to two pounds a week -- the maximum you should shoot for. Quick weight-loss programs actually make it more difficult to lose weight, says Nelson, because they slow your metabolism. Instead of focusing on the scale, some people find that it helps to set a more tangible goal - like fitting into a pair of jeans they can no longer wear, or simply feeling more comfortable in clothes that have gotten too tight. And be sure to reward yourself when you reach a significant goal. Schedule a massage, buy yourself a CD you've been wanting, or treat yourself to a big bunch of fresh flowers or tickets to an event you'd enjoy.

#### 3. Stay conscious.

Give some thought to the triggers that make you overeat. Do you eat when you're sad? Frustrated? Angry? Once you identify those food cues, you can consciously choose another way to respond to them. Maybe a phone call to a friend or a long, hot bath would do the trick. When you're ready to eat a meal, sit down at the table and focus on what you're doing -- don't read or watch TV. Making mealtimes a deliberate activity helps avoid those hurried, distracted snacks and quasi-meals we grab on the fly that result in calories consumed but not enjoyed.

#### 4. Plan for success.

Successful weight loss requires significant changes in your lifestyle and planning ahead. Making grocery lists, stocking your pantry with healthy food, and scheduling time for workouts will make those changes easier. Think ahead about how to circumvent defeat, too. If asked to bring hors d'oeuvres to a party, make it a vegetable plate. If you have trouble keeping yourself motivated, enlist a friend as your weight-loss buddy.

#### 5. Get moving.

Exercising not only burns calories and compensates for the slower metabolism that comes with eating less -- it makes you healthier. It can be fun, too, if you choose a sport or activity you love. A daily stroll can put you back in touch with the joy of movement. From there, try swimming, dance, skating, or anything that gets you going. Or just make small changes in your daily routine, like taking the stairs when you can instead of the elevator.

You don't have to be a super athlete in order to burn enough calories to lose weight, either. According to a study reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, moderate exercise can be just as effective as vigorous exercise. Women in the study were asked to reduce their calorie intake and were then given exercise programs of

varying intensity. After a year, the women who exercised moderately lost about the same amount of weight as the women who worked out more vigorously and for longer periods. That's good news for people who prefer a half hour on the treadmill to an hour in a spinning class.

It's also a good idea to build strength training into your workouts. The less muscle you have, the harder it is to lose weight and keep it off. Here's why: Muscle is metabolically active; it takes energy, in the form of calories, to sustain it. Fat isn't, and it doesn't. So the more muscle you have, the more calories you burn, even at rest. Two or three 30-minute weight-lifting sessions each week will make a big difference in your body composition and, therefore, in the number of calories you burn each day. For help on planning a workout routine and sticking to it, try our fitness contract and our Working Out topic page.

## **6. Eat healthfully.**

You can be well nourished while you're losing weight, says Nelson. In fact, eating well makes it easier to lose weight because you'll feel better, and you'll have more energy to stay active. Ideally, your daily intake of calories will break down like this: 45 to 65 percent from carbohydrates, 10 to 35 percent from protein, and 20 to 35 percent from fat. The American Heart Association recommends eating no more than 7 percent of your daily calories in saturated fat, and of those, less than 1 percent in trans fat.

And make sure you load up on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. They'll help provide lifelong protection from a host of health problems, including cancer and heart disease. Keep in mind, too, that when you're planning your diet, you're making lifelong changes. Don't deprive yourself of foods you like or that your body needs. Just eat less of the more fattening ones (an occasional scoop of Haagen-Dazs, not a pint). For meal planning tools and ideas, try our Healthy Eating topic page.

## **7. Track your success.**

Successful "losers," studies show, chart their progress. Writing it down keeps you from fooling yourself about how much you're eating and exercising. And watching those numbers drop on the scale can be a great motivator. What's more, research shows that people who keep a food diary, even if they're not consciously eating less, lose weight. "If you write it down, you know if you're eating enough fruits and vegetables or if you can eat an extra snack," says Nelson.

## **8. Bounce back.**

One holiday blowout doesn't ruin your chances for successful weight loss. And an extra piece of cake is not a mandate to polish off the platter. Everyone gives in to temptation once in a while -- the trick is to gently guide yourself back on track. There are no "bad" foods, and there's no point in beating yourself up for succumbing to some high-calorie treat. The more consistently you make wise food choices, the better you'll feel and the quicker you'll reach your goal. Just remember that controlling your eating is not an all-or-nothing proposition. It's calling the shots for yourself every day of your life.

*Information courtesy of Caremark.*