

If you've tried a diet and "failed," consider yourself successful. **DIETS DON'T WORK!** Drastically cutting calories, eliminating entire food groups and/or depriving yourself of foods you actually like is not a recipe for long-term success. The good news is that you can permanently change destructive eating habits and break the "diet mentality" for good. Below are strategies to help you approach weight management with a more positive and productive mindset.

Set specific, realistic goals

Rather than setting your sites on a particular number of the scale, measure success in more meaningful ways. For example, aim to lose a clothing size or measure your losses in inches around your hips, waist, thighs, and arms. If you are focused on using the scale, aim for no more than 1-2 pounds of weight loss per week. Losing even 5-7% of your total body weight has a beneficial impact on reducing the risk for developing many chronic diseases and can provide a sense of motivation.

Become calorie conscious

Simply put, weight loss occurs when there is a calorie deficit, meaning that your daily caloric intake is less than the calories you are expending. The bottom line is to lose weight you either have to reduce the calories you are eating or increase the calories you are burning through physical activity. To put it in perspective, one pound is equal to approximately 3,500 calories. If you reduce your intake by 500 calories a day, you can lose up to one pound a week (500 fewer calories a day x 7 days = 3,500 calories). Creating a daily deficit of 500 calories is easier than you think, especially when you start to pay attention to portion sizes and begin to move more.

Track your intake

Studies show that writing down what you eat is an effective method for weight loss. It raises awareness and forces you to think about what and how much you're eating. Every bite or sip counts! Tracking is also an effective tool for evaluating your eating habits and patterns. Online tools such as <http://www.caloriecount.about.com>, <http://www.thedailyplate.com/>, and <http://fitday.com/> are great resources for tracking both your intake pattern and activity level and for learning about how many calories are in the foods that you choose to eat. For the smartphone crowd, try the "Lose It," "MyFitnessPal," or "SparkPeople" apps. In addition to a tracking tool, www.sparkpeople.com provides daily meal and fitness plans.

Stay a day ahead of your meals

Busy, over-packed schedules can send you straight to the drive thru if you don't have a plan. Make use of your downtime to develop a basic menu for the upcoming week, to go food shop, and to batch cook. Keep healthful foods on hand so you can toss together a wholesome meal in no time.

Avoid "bottom heavy" diets

Distribute your calories throughout the day rather than eating most of them after the sun goes down. This helps to keep your metabolism fired up, prevents drastic swings in blood sugar and helps with portion control throughout the day. A good rule of thumb is to eat every 3-4 hours. Think "mini-meals" rather than a light breakfast, quick lunch and oversized dinner. Don't skimp on breakfast. Eating a balanced breakfast primes your metabolism and reduces the chances you'll overeat later in the day.

Mind your meal and snacks and ride out cravings

Being “mindful” around meals and snacks means that you are truly focused on what you are eating. If you have a tendency to eat out of “habit” versus “hunger,” you are likely eating more than you realize. Eating when you are truly hungry, not because you’re bored or procrastinating, can help you trim off 500 calories per day in no time.

If you know that it’s not hunger that’s pulling you towards the ice cream, try to “ride out” the craving. Have something hot to drink, like decaffeinated tea or sugar-free hot chocolate to take the edge off without adding on the calories. Sometimes it’s not what you’re eating, but what’s eating you. If you struggle with emotional eating, develop a technique to help change this eating pattern. Taking a study break, visiting friends, listening to music, going for a walk, writing in a journal or even just taking a few deep breathes can help turn the tide.

Rethink your drinks

Don’t spend the day sipping away your calories. Beverages like juice, soda, sweet teas, energy drinks, and flavored coffees can put a big dent in your daily calorie budget. Make a habit of increasing your water intake. If plain old water isn’t your thing, jazz it up with fresh lemon or lime or try a calorie-free flavored seltzer. Count your cocktails too. Alcohol is dense in calories, even before it makes its way into a mixer.

Move it to lose it

The most current physical activity guidelines recommend:

- A minimum of 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity, or an equivalent combination of the two.
- For additional and more extensive health benefits, do at least 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity, or 150 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity, or an equivalent combination of the two.
- Aerobic activity should be performed in increments of at least 10 minutes, and preferably, it should be spread throughout the week.
- Muscle-strengthening activities that involve all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms) should be incorporated on 2 or more days a week.

Moderate-intensity aerobic activity means you’re working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat. You’ll be able to talk, but not sing the words to your favorite song. It’s a “5 or 6” on a scale of “0 to 10.” Brisk walking, dancing, swimming, or bicycling on a level terrain are examples.

Vigorous-intensity aerobic activity means you’re breathing hard and fast, and your heart rate has gone up quite a bit. You won’t be able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath. It’s a “7 or 8” on a scale of “0 to 10.” Jogging, singles tennis, swimming continuous laps, or bicycling uphill are examples.

For more information: <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/adults.html>