Managing your weight

In addition to helping you feel and look better, reaching a healthier body weight is good for your overall health and well-being.

Someone who is overweight or obese is at greater risk of developing many diseases including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and some types of cancer.

The secret to success is making changes and sticking with them. Below are some elements of a successful weight loss plan recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Focus on foods you need

Building a healthier plate can help you meet your nutrient needs and maintain your weight. Foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products and lean protein foods contain the nutrients you need without too many calories.

- Start with breakfast. Eat a breakfast that helps you meet your food group needs. People who skip breakfast often weigh more. Eating a nutrient-dense breakfast may help you lose weight and keep it off.

- Have healthy snacks available at home and bring healthy snacks to eat when on-the-go, such as carrot and celery sticks with peanut butter or whole grain crackers and low-fat cheese.

- When preparing meals, include vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, and lean protein foods. These foods provide nutrients with fewer calories.

- To feel satisfied with fewer calories, replace high-calorie foods with lower-calorie foods. You can eat larger portions of these foods for fewer calories. For example, follow the advice to "make half your plate fruits and vegetables."

Eat the right amount of calories for you

Everyone has a personal calorie limit. Staying within yours can help you get to or maintain a healthy weight. Daily calorie estimates range from 1,600 to 2,400 calories per day for adult women, and 2,000 to 3,000 calories per day for adult men depending on age and physical activity level. Reaching a healthier weight is a balancing act. The secret is learning how to balance your "energy in" and "energy out" over the long run. "Energy in" is the calories from foods and beverages you have each day. "Energy out" is the calories you burn for basic body functions and physical activity. You will lose weight when the calories you eat and drink are less than the calories you burn. The current high rates of overweight and obesity in the United States mean that many people are taking in more calories than they burn.

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Decrease portion sizes

The USDA Dietary Guidelines encourage you to enjoy your food, but eat less and to avoid oversized portions. The amount you eat or drink plays an important role in your energy balance strategy. Most people eat and drink more when served larger portions. Choosing smaller portions can help you lose weight and keep it off.

Eat fewer empty calories

A great way to help you manage your body weight is to eat fewer empty calories. Empty calories are calories from solid fats, added sugars, or both. Many empty calories that Americans eat come from foods and beverages that provide calories but few nutrients—such as desserts, sodas, and candies. Added sugars and fats load these choices with extra calories you don't need. Here are three ways to cut back on empty calories:

1. Choose foods and drinks with little or no added sugars or solid fats. For example, drink water instead of sugary drinks. There are about 10 packets of sugar in a 12-ounce can of soda, while water has no added sugars. Select lean cuts of meats or poultry and fat-free or low-fat milk and cheese. Fatty meats, poultry skin, and whole milk or regular cheese have more solid fats.

2. Select products that contain added sugars and solid fats less often. For example, eat sugary desserts only once in a while. Most days, select fruit for dessert instead of a sugary option. Make major sources of solid fats–such as cakes, cookies, ice cream, pizza, regular cheese, sausages, and hot dogs–occasional choices, not everyday foods.

3. When you have food and drinks with added sugars and solid fats, choose a small portion. For example, instead of eating three scoops of ice cream, order one scoop.

Increase physical activity

Physical activity is an important part of managing body weight. It can help you achieve a healthy weight and prevent excess weight gain. However, physical activity is also important to all other aspects of your health. Benefits include sleeping better at night, decreasing your chances of becoming depressed, and helping you look good. When you are not physically active, you are more likely to have health problems, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and high blood cholesterol.

Decrease screen time

To help manage your body weight, reduce the amount of time you spend being sedentary. This includes time spent in front of a screen—including watching television, playing video games, and using a computer or smartphone. People who spend more time being sedentary are more likely to be overweight or obese. Most people can't change how much time they spend on the computer for work or school, but you can decrease your screen time during other times of the day and on the weekend.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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