

Your Way to a Healthy Weight

A healthy lifestyle does not just happen - it is all about making choices and an effort to stick to those choices. Choose to eat healthy and be physically active. Depending on what your lifestyle is like now, you may need to make many changes or just a few.

Are You Ready for a Change?

Change is a process, not an event - it takes time, patience, and practice. Change happens in stages. It can take up to a year before a new behaviour or habit becomes a permanent one.

Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is a lifelong process that requires a change in behaviour, eating habits, and physical activity. It is a good idea to spend some time thinking about whether you are ready to make this commitment and how much you want to change.

Consider some of the questions below, and try to answer them honestly:

- Is it a good time for a change?
 - Consider your time commitments, relationships, job status, and health.
- Is achieving a healthier weight worth the effort?
 - Change involves trade offs. Are you willing to make them to reach your goals?
 - How prepared are you to meet some of the challenges in order to make changes?

To Change or Not to Change

Make two lists: one with reasons for making changes and one with reasons for not making changes. The list for making changes should reflect that you are making changes for yourself - not for others! Keep your list of reasons to change close by to remind you why you are doing what you are doing.

What is Your Weight Goal?

Set a realistic weight goal. A healthy weight for you is not just one magic number. In fact, being at a healthy weight falls somewhere within a range. Use a body mass index (BMI) chart to see the range of weights you can be and still be at a healthy weight.



Is Your Weight a Health Risk?

Along with looking at your BMI, consider your body shape. Do you carry most of your weight around your waist or your hips? If you carry more around your waist, it can be a higher health risk than if most of your weight is around your hips.

Many overweight people can reduce their health risk for some chronic diseases by reducing their current weight by 10 percent. While this may not be what you ideally want to lose, it may be a more realistic goal to begin with. When goals are realistic, it increases the chance of achieving lasting success.

Reaching Your Goals

Strive for better health and eating habits as your goals rather than just weight loss. It has been shown that if people do this, it usually leads to weight loss that stays off.

Healthy Eating for a Healthy Weight

Use *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* to build an eating plan that works for you. Become familiar with the food groups and the serving sizes listed in the food guide. You need to eat at least the minimum number of servings from each food group each day.

The Food Guide Servings may be smaller than what you think they are. It is easy to underestimate how many Food Guide Servings you have eaten, so it is important to get a good understanding of Food Guide Serving sizes. That does not mean you have to limit yourself to only one Food Guide Serving from each food group per meal. It is great to have more than one Food Guide Serving of high fibre, lower fat foods like vegetables and fruit at a meal. These foods are lower calorie choices, and they fill you up!

When you start to incorporate daily physical activity into your life, you will need to make sure that your body has enough fuel to support the activity. All the more reason to eat healthfully instead of restricting food.

Satisfied, but Not Stuffed

The science of satiety can help. Satiety is the feeling of fullness at the end of a meal, the feeling that you are no longer hungry. Different components of food, such as carbohydrate, fibre, fat, protein, and water, have an effect on satiety.

Foods with a high water and fibre content have a big impact on satiety. These types of foods allow you to eat a satisfying volume of food while controlling calories and helping you meet your nutrient requirements.

Drinking water will not satisfy your hunger, but foods naturally high in water will. These foods include vegetables, fruits, low-fat milk, cooked grains, as well as lean meats, poultry, fish, and legumes. Include more water-rich dishes into your meals: soups, stews, casseroles, pasta with vegetables, and fruit-based desserts. Higher fibre foods include vegetables, fruit, and whole grain products.



On the other hand, fat increases the amount of calories in a food compared to either carbohydrate or protein. Fat has twice as many calories per gram compared to carbohydrate or protein. If you reduce the fat in a meal or snack, then you reduce the calories. Keep in mind that it is important to have some fat in our diet, so you do not have to always choose fat-free products.

Protein is overrated in the dieting world. While protein is necessary in our diet, it does not guarantee weight loss. Many high protein diets are actually low calorie diets in disguise. You may lose weight, but you do not learn good eating habits to keep the weight off. A high protein, low carbohydrate diet can stress the kidneys. Also, high protein diets tend to be high in fat, another health risk!

The key is balancing your protein intake because protein is important for building and maintaining blood, muscle, and other tissues. It also plays a role in satiety because protein foods help you feel less hungry. Following Canada's Food Guide will ensure you get enough, but not too much, protein.

Your long term goal may be to lose weight, but whether it is 10 or 50 pounds, it is helpful to set short term goals to help you get there. Try setting daily or weekly goals. For example, if you want to become more active, what will you do today or this week to meet this goal?

Become Aware of Your Habits

Looking at your current eating and physical activity habits will help you understand what stands between you and a healthier lifestyle. Keeping a journal is one way to find out what you are doing, and it helps keep you on track. It helps you become more aware, or mindful, of your eating and physical activity habits.

Using a journal has been shown to help people achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Create your own so it works for you. An example of what one could include is the time you ate, what you ate in detail, such as the amounts, how hungry you were, what you were doing when you ate, and your emotional state.



Keeping a journal is a learning tool. It is not meant to make you obsessive about what you eat. If you find that keeping a journal is too hard or is making you anxious about every morsel you put into your mouth - stop. Don't get crazy over it!

Keep your journal within easy reach:

- in your day planner
- on your kitchen counter or dining room table
- on your desk

Dump the Diet Mentality

Going on a 'diet' implies that you will eventually go off of it. Most diets that

drastically restrict calories, forbid you to eat certain foods, or insist on combining foods can lead to feelings of hunger, guilt, or confusion. Healthy eating is about enjoying a variety of foods from all four food groups and making lower fat, higher fibre choices.

An important skill to gain is getting in touch with your signs of hunger and fullness. Many things in your past, such as dieting, may lead you to being unable to recognize when you are hungry, full, or in need of emotional support.

Eating because you experience physical hunger involves listening to your body's internal cues, such as a growling stomach or feeling light-headed. You are less likely to overeat if you listen to and respond to internal cues (feeling hungry or full) rather than external cues (seeing food, being stressed, or bored).

Become more aware of what hunger and fullness feels like. Think about how it really feels to be truly hungry. What does it feel like for you? Before you eat, stop and think if you are hungry or not. Pause half way through a meal or snack, and notice if you are getting full before finishing or getting a second helping.

Putting it All Together

There is no secret to weight management.

Eat fewer calories, and burn more calories with regular physical activity.

However, reducing your caloric intake too much will leave you feeling hungry

and deprived. By making the right food choices you can eat to feel full and satisfied while managing your weight.



Get into a Routine: Enjoy Meals and Snacks

Do you skip breakfast and lunch, then eat all night long? Many people skip meals believing that this will help them lose weight.

Unfortunately, skipping meals usually leads to weight gain. Successful losers have learned that having regular planned meals and snacks works in the long run.



Spread your food choices throughout the day at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with one or two snacks in between. Eat within one to two hours upon waking up. Do not go longer than four to six hours without eating during the time you are awake.

Healthy snacking and impulse eating are not the same thing, so it's important to have healthy snacks on hand. Plan your snacks so that you do not reach for a chocolate bar or donut at your coffee break. Choose your snacks so that they count as Food Guide Servings from the four food groups. Once you have had at least the minimum number of Food Guide Servings from each food group, then consider if you are still hungry. If so, reach for another Food Guide Serving or two of vegetables, fruit, low fat yogurt, or high fibre cereal or toast.

Supporting Your Efforts

To build an improved lifestyle, you need a strong support system. Ask your spouse, friend, co-worker, or a family member to be your support when the going gets tough. Consider going to a professional counselor if you are struggling with personal problems that lead to overeating or get in the way of being active.

Expect a Challenge

Maintaining may be as challenging as achieving a healthy weight. Good news! People who have lost weight and kept it off for a long time report that it actually gets easier. That is because the longer you eat well and are physically active, the more likely these habits become second nature.

You may find it is harder at certain times to stick to your new habits. If you go back to old habits, learn to forgive yourself and start again. Set a plan of action if your weight starts to creep up again.

Investigate why your weight might be going up. Have you cut back on your physical activity, or have you started to increase your portion sizes?

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and healthy weight involves the same process as attaining it - keep walking the path you are on!

**For more information call the
Nutrition & Physical Activity Advice
Line at 905.546.3630**

