January 2011

The holiday season is behind us and this is a new year! Don’t let the few extra pounds get you down, just do something about taking them off. For anyone who made a resolution to lose those unwanted pounds, this newsletter can help with that by providing useful information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The content below was taken directly from the CDC’s website. If you’d like more information, please visit http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/losing_weight/index.html. This issue is the second of three devoted to weight. The December 2010 issue of Health and Safety News focused on healthy weight and this issue focuses on weight loss. The final discussion of this topic will be covered in the February 2011 issue. For the information that is highlighted, to read more about the topic, right click on your mouse and select Open Hyperlink.

Healthy Weight

Losing Weight

What is healthy weight loss?
It's natural for anyone trying to lose weight to want to lose it very quickly. But evidence shows that people who lose weight gradually and steadily (about 1 to 2 pounds per week) are more successful at keeping weight off. Healthy weight loss isn't just about a "diet" or "program". It's about an ongoing lifestyle that includes long-term changes in daily eating and exercise habits.

To lose weight, you must use up more calories than you take in. Since one pound equals 3,500 calories, you need to reduce your caloric intake by 500-1,000 calories per day to lose about 1 to 2 pounds per week.¹

Once you've achieved a healthy weight, by relying on healthful eating and physical activity most days of the week (about 60-90 minutes of moderate intensity exercise), you are more likely to be successful at keeping the weight off over the long term.

Losing weight is not easy, and it takes commitment. But if you're ready to get started, there is a step-by-step guide beginning on page 3 to help get you on the road to weight loss and better health.
Even Modest Weight Loss Can Mean Big Benefits

The good news is that no matter what your weight loss goal is, even a modest weight loss, such as 5 to 10 percent of your total body weight, is likely to produce health benefits, such as improvements in blood pressure, blood cholesterol, and blood sugars.²

For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, a 5 percent weight loss equals 10 pounds, bringing your weight down to 190 pounds. While this weight may still be in the "overweight" or "obese" range, this modest weight loss can decrease your risk factors for chronic diseases related to obesity.

So even if the overall goal seems large, see it as a journey rather than just a final destination. You'll learn new eating and physical activity habits that will help you live a healthier lifestyle. These habits may help you maintain your weight loss over time.

In addition to improving your health, maintaining a weight loss is likely to improve your life in other ways. For example, a study of participants in the National Weight Control Registry* found that those who had maintained a significant weight loss reported improvements in not only their physical health, but also their energy levels, physical mobility, general mood, and self-confidence.

References


Healthy Weight- it’s not a diet, it’s a lifestyle!

Getting Started

Losing weight takes more than desire. It takes commitment and a well-thought-out plan. Here's a step-by-step guide to getting started.

Step 1: Make a commitment

Making the decision to lose weight, change your lifestyle, and become healthier is a big step to take. Start simply by making a commitment to yourself. Many people find it helpful to sign a written contract committing to the process. This contract may include things like the amount of weight you want to lose, the date you'd like to lose the weight by, the dietary changes you'll make to establish healthy eating habits, and a plan for getting regular physical activity.

Writing down the reasons why you want to lose weight can also help. It might be because you have a family history of heart disease, or because you want to see your kids get married, or simply because you want to feel better in your clothes. Post these reasons where they serve as a daily reminder of why you want to make this change.

Step 2: Take stock of where you are

Consider talking to your health care provider. He or she can evaluate your height, weight, and explore other weight-related risk factors you may have. Ask for a follow-up appointment to monitor changes in your weight or any related health conditions.

Keep a "food diary" for a few days, in which you write down everything you eat. By doing this, you become more aware of what you are eating and when you are eating. This awareness can help you avoid mindless eating.

Next, examine your current lifestyle. Identify things that might pose challenges to your weight loss efforts. For example, does your work or travel schedule make it difficult to get enough physical activity? Do you find yourself eating sugary foods because that's what you buy for your kids? Do your coworkers frequently bring high-calorie items, such as doughnuts, to the workplace to share with everyone? Think through things you can do to help overcome these challenges.

Finally, think about aspects of your lifestyle that can help you lose weight. For example, is there an area near your workplace where you and some coworkers can take a walk at lunchtime? Is there a place in your community, such as a YMCA, with exercise facilities for you and child care for your kids?
Step 3: Set realistic goals

Set some short-term goals and reward your efforts along the way. If your long-term goal is to lose 40 pounds and to control your high blood pressure, some short-term eating and physical activity goals might be to start eating breakfast, taking a 15 minute walk in the evenings, or having a salad or vegetable with supper.

Focus on two or three goals at a time. Great, effective goals are —

- Specific
- Realistic
- Forgiving (less than perfect)

For example, "Exercise More" is not a specific goal. But if you say, "I will walk 15 minutes, 3 days a week for the first week," you are setting a specific and realistic goal for the first week.

Remember, small changes every day can lead to big results in the long run. Also remember that realistic goals are achievable goals. By achieving your short-term goals day-by-day, you'll feel good about your progress and will be motivated to continue. Setting unrealistic goals, such as losing 20 pounds in 2 weeks, can leave you feeling defeated and frustrated.

Being realistic also means expecting occasional setbacks. Setbacks happen when you get away from your plan for whatever reason – maybe the holidays, longer work hours, or another life change. When setbacks happen, get back on track as quickly as possible. Also take some time to think about what you would do differently if a similar situation happens, to prevent setbacks.

Keep in mind everyone is different – what works for someone else might not be right for you. Just because your neighbor lost weight by taking up running, doesn't mean running is the best option for you. Try a variety of activities – walking, swimming, tennis, or group exercise classes to see what you enjoy most and can fit into your life. These activities will be easier to stick with over the long term.

Step 4: Identify resources for information and support

Find family members or friends who will support your weight loss efforts. Making lifestyle changes can feel easier when you have others you can talk to and rely on for support. You might have coworkers or neighbors with similar goals, and together you can share healthful recipes and plan group exercise.

Joining a weight loss group or visiting a health care professional such as a registered dietitian, can help.
Step 5: Continually "check in" with yourself to monitor your progress

Revisit the goals you set for yourself (in Step 3) and evaluate your progress regularly. If you set a goal to walk each morning but are having trouble fitting it in before work, see if you can shift your work hours or if you can get your walk in at lunchtime or after work. Evaluate which parts of your plan are working well and which ones need tweaking. Then rewrite your goals and plan accordingly.

If you are consistently achieving a particular goal, add a new goal to help you continue on your pathway to success.

Reward yourself for your successes! Recognize when you're meeting your goals and be proud of your progress. Use non-food rewards, such as a bouquet of freshly picked flowers, a sports outing with friends, or a relaxing bath. Rewards help keep you motivated on the path to better health.

Improving Your Eating Habits

When it comes to eating, we have strong habits. Some are good ("I always eat breakfast"), and some are not so good ("I always clean my plate"). Although many of our eating habits were established during childhood, it doesn’t mean it's too late to change them.
Making sudden, radical changes to eating habits such as eating nothing but cabbage soup, can lead to short term weight loss. However, such radical changes are neither healthy nor a good idea, and won't be successful in the long run. Permanently improving your eating habits requires a thoughtful approach in which you Reflect, Replace, and Reinforce.

- **REFLECT** on all of your specific eating habits, both bad and good, and your common triggers for unhealthy eating.
- **REPLACE** your unhealthy eating habits with healthier ones.
- **REINFORCE** your new, healthier eating habits.

**Reflect, Replace, Reinforce: A process for improving your eating habits**

1. **Create a list of your eating habits.** Keeping a food diary for a few days, in which you write down everything you eat and the time of day you ate it, will help you uncover your habits. For example, you might discover that you always seek a sweet snack to get you through the mid-afternoon energy slump. Use [this diary](PDF-36k) to help. It's good to note how you were feeling when you decided to eat, especially if you were eating when not hungry. Were you tired? Stressed out?

2. **Highlight the habits** on your list that may be leading you to overeat. Common eating habits that can lead to weight gain are:
   - Eating too fast
   - Always cleaning your plate
   - Eating when not hungry
   - Eating while standing up (may lead to eating mindlessly or too quickly)
   - Always eating dessert
   - Skipping meals (or maybe just breakfast)

3. **Look at the unhealthy eating habits** you've highlighted. Be sure you've identified all the triggers that cause you to engage in those habits. Identify a few you'd like to work on improving first. Don't forget to pat yourself on the back for the things you're doing right. Maybe you almost always eat fruit for dessert, or you drink low-fat or fat-free milk. These are good habits! Recognizing your successes will help encourage you to make more changes.

4. **Create a list of "cues"** by reviewing your food diary to become more aware of when and where you're "triggered" to eat for reasons other than hunger. Note how you are typically feeling at those times. Often an environmental "cue", or a particular emotional state, is what encourages eating for non-hunger reasons.

Common triggers for eating when not hungry are:

- Opening up the cabinet and seeing your favorite snack food.
- Sitting at home watching television.
- Before or after a stressful meeting or situation at work.
- Coming home after work and having no idea what's for dinner.
- Having someone offer you a dish they made "just for you!"
Walking past a candy dish on the counter.
Sitting in the break room beside the vending machine.
Seeing a plate of doughnuts at the morning staff meeting.
Swinging through your favorite drive-through every morning.
Feeling bored or tired and thinking food might offer a pick-me-up.

5. **Circle the "cues" on your list that you face on a daily or weekly basis.** Going home for the Thanksgiving holiday may be a trigger for you to overeat, and eventually, you want to have a plan for as many eating cues as you can. But for now, focus on the ones you face more often.

6. **Ask yourself** these questions for each "cue" you've circled:

   - **Is there anything I can do to avoid the cue or situation?** This option works best for cues that don't involve others. For example, could you choose a different route to work to avoid stopping at a fast food restaurant on the way? Is there another place in the break room where you can sit so you're not next to the vending machine?
   - **For things I can't avoid, can I do something differently that would be healthier?** Obviously, you can't avoid all situations that trigger your unhealthy eating habits, like staff meetings at work. In these situations, evaluate your options. Could you suggest or bring healthier snacks or beverages? Could you offer to take notes to distract your attention? Could you sit farther away from the food so it won't be as easy to grab something? Could you plan ahead and eat a healthy snack before the meeting?

7. **Replace unhealthy habits with new, healthy ones.** For example, in reflecting upon your eating habits, you may realize that you eat too fast when you eat alone. So, make a commitment to share a lunch each week with a colleague, or have a neighbor over for dinner one night a week. Other strategies might include putting your fork down between bites or minimizing other distractions (i.e. watching the news during dinner) that might keep you from paying attention to how quickly — and how much — you're eating.

   Here are more ideas to help you replace unhealthy habits:

   - Eat more slowly. If you eat too quickly, you may "clean your plate" instead of paying attention to whether your hunger is satisfied.
   - Eat only when you're truly hungry instead of when you are tired, anxious, or feeling an emotion besides hunger. If you find yourself eating when you are experiencing an emotion
besides hunger, such as boredom or anxiety, try to find a non-eating activity to do instead. You may find a quick walk or phone call with a friend helps you feel better.

- Plan meals ahead of time to ensure that you eat a healthy well-balanced meal.

8. **Reinforce your new, healthy habits and be patient with yourself.** Habits take time to develop. It doesn't happen overnight. When you do find yourself engaging in an unhealthy habit, stop as quickly as possible and ask yourself: Why do I do this? When did I start doing this? What changes do I need to make? Be careful not to berate yourself or think that one mistake "blows" a whole day's worth of healthy habits. You can do it! It just takes one day at a time!

Remember, conquer weight loss **ONE DAY AT A TIME.**