

Making Lifestyle Changes Instead of Going on a Diet

The Dieting Cycle

When is the last time you went on a diet? Consider the changes you made, how long they lasted and whether those changes worked well for you long-term. If dieting worked, you'd be able to diet once, reach your goal and never diet again.

Diets are usually restrictive. They place strict limits around *what* you can and cannot eat, *how much* and maybe even *when* you are allowed to eat. These "food rules" can make you feel deprived, leading to a cycle of eating too little (restricting) and eating too much (bingeing). Any weight lost can easily be gained back once you stop the diet.

Lasting Changes to Your Lifestyle

Instead of dieting, consider the effect of making several less-restrictive changes to your lifestyle. These changes should be simple enough to manage within your busy schedule while still moving you toward your goal. Once you begin to see results, you'll likely feel motivated to continue.

The lifestyle changes you choose to make will vary, depending on your health, schedule and goals. Examples of changes you could make include:

- replacing soda with water
- practicing portion control
- writing down the foods you eat each day and how each food makes you feel
- balancing your meals between protein, carbohydrate and healthful fats

- increasing the amount and variety of vegetables you eat
- cooking at home instead of eating out
- adding several short walking breaks to your routine
- buying fewer packaged foods and replacing them with fresh, unprocessed foods
- doing 30 minutes of physical activity a day, most days of the week
- packing a lunch to bring to work.

There are many other changes you can make — be creative! The following sections will focus on **practicing portion control**, **balancing meals** and **physical activity**.

Practicing Portion Control

Eating too much of any food (even healthful ones) can cause you to gain weight. That's why portion control is important!

Each time you eat, your body uses *only what it needs* of the calories and nutrients, and stores what's left as fat. For example, protein you eat from meat, quinoa or eggs is used:

- to build and repair tissues
- to make hormones and enzymes
- as a "building block" of your bones, muscles, skin and blood.

If you consume more protein than is needed to do these tasks, the extra will be stored as fat and you will likely gain weight.

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Important: The amount of calories, protein, carbohydrate and fat you need will depend on your age, gender, height and activity level. Talk with your health care provider or dietitian if you have questions about how much you should be eating to nourish your body well.

Tips for managing portions

- Eat from smaller plates, bowls and cups.
- Consider recommended portion sizes:
 - 3 ounces of meat is about the size and thickness of a deck of playing cards.
 - 1 medium apple or 1 cup of raw vegetables is about the size of a baseball.
 - 1 ounce of cheese is about the size of 4 stacked dice.
 - ½ cup of ice cream or ½ cup of cooked pasta is about the size of an ice cream scoop.
 - 1 slice of bread or one 6-inch tortilla is about the size of a DVD.
 - 1 teaspoon of butter is about the size of a poker chip.
- Wait 10 minutes after finishing your plate before going back for seconds. Sometimes, it takes a bit for your brain to catch up with your stomach!
- Never eat from a large package. For example, scoop out a small portion of nuts onto a small napkin instead eating straight from the container or bag.
- Save ½ of your restaurant meal for later. It'll make a great lunch for the next day!

Balancing Meals

Eating meals that include protein, fat and carbohydrates will help make sure you're giving your body the nutrients it needs to function well. It will also help you feel full and satisfied after a meal, which can help to prevent mindless snacking throughout the day ("grazing").

One method to help you balance your meals is the plate method. This method is a way to take a quick look at your plate to make sure:

- ½ of your plate is filled with non-starchy vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, greens)
- ¼ of your plate is filled with grains and starches (bread, pasta, potatoes, corn, peas)
- ¼ of your plate is filled with protein (chicken, fish, eggs, beans, tofu)

You can also include a small dish of fruit and a beverage (water, fat-free or low-fat milk).

Physical Activity

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends all adults do at least **150 minutes of aerobic exercise each week**. To achieve this, consider making a goal to do 30 minutes of aerobic exercise a day, most days of the week. This could include activities such as include walking, biking, ice skating or dancing.

The CDC also recommends all adults do **muscle-strengthening activities 2 or more days each week**. This should include activities that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms) such as pushups, squats and abdominal crunches. You do not need to lift weights in a gym to build muscle strength.

Tips for increasing physical activity

- Add walking breaks to your daily routine. Even 10-minute walks count toward your 30 minutes of aerobic exercise each day!
- Park farther away from the store to get some extra steps.
- Grab a buddy! Having someone else count on you can help you stay on track.
- Take advantage of short commutes by walking or biking to the store or work.

Remember that the "sitting disease" is real. The more you sit the higher your risk for developing heart disease or diabetes, or for gaining weight. Get up and move!