

WebMD Feature

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7 Diet Tips That Really Work

Try these creative weight loss tips to make dieting easier — and more successful

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Whether you're looking to lose a few pounds — or have 30, 40 or more pounds to shed — a few creative weight loss tips can make it easier. To help you stick with your diet and meet your weight loss goals, WebMD asked several nutrition and fitness experts to share their secrets of success. The 7 diet tips that follow can help you get on the fast track to safe weight loss, no matter what kind of diet you're on.

Weight Loss Tip #1: Count on more than willpower alone.

It's easy to blame diet failures on a lack of willpower, says Lisa Sanders, MD, a Yale University primary care clinician-educator. But willpower isn't meant to be the only tool you use. It's more like a safety net for when life spins out of control.

Basing your weight loss efforts only on willpower can actually work against your diet goals, says Martha Beck, PhD, life coach and author of *The Four Day Win: End Your Diet War and Achieve Thinner Peace*. For instance, research shows that trying not to think about something — like that frosted chocolate brownie — can actually make you focus more intensely on it. When you're rested, relaxed, and enjoying life, Beck says, you can suppress unwanted thoughts and feelings fairly easily. But when you're stressed, annoyed, or pressed for time, resisting temptations is much harder. So rather than relying on willpower to get you through, set a goal to develop a conscious awareness of what you eat without obsessing about it.

Weight Loss Tip #2: Set yourself up for success.

Here are two ways you can set yourself up to succeed. First, says Andrea N. Giancoli, MPH, RD, eliminate any food that doesn't support your weight loss goals. Giancoli is a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association (ADA). She says it'll be much easier to resist temptation if unhealthy choices aren't around. Purge your pantry of any foods that list "partially hydrogenated oils" as an ingredient. Toss out sodas or other drinks made with sugar or high-fructose corn syrup. And, especially if you prefer bottled water to tap, keep a supply on hand. It's easier to grab on the go.

Then give your diet some help by making it easy to exercise. Gregory Florez is founder and CEO of FitAdvisor.com, a top-rated fitness training service. He says two things you can do to avoid becoming a couch potato is to clear off the clutter hanging on your treadmill and then pull other fitness gear out into the open where you can see it.

Weight Loss Tip #3: Set up a support network.

Studies show that social support is crucial — especially for women, says health psychologist Bess Marcus, PhD, professor of psychiatry and human behavior at Brown University Medical School in Providence, Rhode Island. You can help yourself by finding at least one person who believes in you and your ability to succeed at your weight loss goals. “Line up a friend to walk with you, watch your kids so you can work out, or even just call to check in on how you’re doing,” says Marcus.

If you want to be social *and* in good shape, make a date with a friend for twice-weekly workouts. If exercise includes social time, you’re more likely to look forward to lacing up your sneakers. Sports medicine researchers at Indiana University found that working out with a partner is the best predictor of exercise satisfaction, and a partner can help you stick with your routine. For even more motivation, sign up for a team sport like soccer, volleyball, or Ultimate Frisbee. Then you’ll have a crowd of people depending on you.

Weight Loss Tip #4: Set realistic goals.

If you’ve been inactive for months (or even years), don’t immediately plan to work out every day. “Appraise your life,” Marcus says, “and then make some strategic changes that you can realistically achieve.” And don’t be afraid to start small, especially with weight loss goals.

Beck recommends setting goals that are so easy they’re almost laughable. Take your list of daily goals, she says, such as “Eat 5 servings of veggies a day” or “Snack only once between meals,” and cut each one in half. Aim for 2.5 servings of vegetables. Cut down your snacks to 2 per day.

Still seem too hard? Then cut those goals in half again. Make your goals so incredibly easy that you’re sure you can’t fail to meet them, Beck says. Then you’ll be motivated to continue. Next, set dates to increase your goals, adding that extra serving of veggies or 10 more minutes to your workout until you reach your maximum potential.

Weight Loss Tip #5: Police your portions.

If you're like most women, a "serving" is the portion size you're used to seeing on your plate. Clearly, bigger portions have more calories. And calories are what it all comes down to when it comes to losing or maintaining weight, says **Lisa R. Young, PhD, RD, author of *The Portion Teller Plan*.**

Some foods are more calorie-dense than others: 1 cup of raw broccoli contains 31 calories, so a double serving of 2 cups gives you only 62 calories. But 1 cup of premium ice cream can easily hit you with 300 calories or more. A larger, double serving can mean a whopping 600 calories. If you take in more calories than your body needs, the extra calories are stored as fat, **Young** tells WebMD. To tally portion size correctly, keep a measuring cup handy for a quick reality-check.

Weight Loss Tip #6: Picture your future self.

Have you thought of where your weight loss plan is taking you? Let your mind explore your future self, says Steven Gurgevich, PhD, director of the Mind-Body Clinic at the University of Arizona College of Medicine in Tucson and co-author of *The Self-Hypnosis Diet*.

Picture yourself the way you hope to be six months or a year from now – how you look, how you feel, and who you spend your time with. Imagine yourself creating your life the way you'd like it to be. Next, invent one or two affirmations that state your intention to be fit and healthy. For example, “I am whole, healthy and strong,” or “I am satisfied with just one piece of chocolate.” Creating a mindset that makes it easier to stick to your weight loss plan is just as important as how much time you spend on the treadmill.

Weight Loss Tip #7: Be ready to work.

“We’re deeply conditioned to do what we’ve already done,” says life coach M. J. Ryan, author of *This Year I Will . . . How To Finally Change a Habit, Keep a Resolution, or Make a Dream Come True*. If, for the past two years, you’ve come home from work, grabbed a soda, and crashed on the couch with take-out, you’re strongly conditioned to do that again tonight and tomorrow night, too. Change isn't impossible, but it does take work.

“To develop new habits, you have to make new neural pathways,” Ryan tells WebMD. So create weight loss reminders to help jolt your mind out of old habits and into new ones. Try posting a note on your fridge, reminding you to eat fruits and veggies or drink more water. Or post notes on your bathroom or bedroom mirror with upbeat messages like “Remember to breathe!” or “Hey, beautiful!”

Before you know it, you’ll be smiling back at the face — and body — in the mirror.