

Conquer weight gain with small changes

by Lynda Johnson, R.D.

For success in maintaining a healthy weight, USDA has an important message for young and old, “Eat Smart, Play Hard.” This USDA Food and Nutrition Service Campaign promotes healthy eating and encourages physical activity in children and families. By following the USDA Dietary Guidelines, and adopting the MyPyramid pattern for our food choices, we can learn to “Eat Smart.” “Play Hard” simply means we need to move more, and places a positive spin on movement since physical activity should be enjoyable. Being active helps you maintain a healthy weight, as well as reduces stress and improves mood.

“Small changes over time can lead to a big difference in your weight and your health. Short-term diets simply don’t work in the long run because you end up feeling deprived, starved, and often bored with the regiment,” states Lynda Johnson, R.D., Nutrition and Health Education Specialist with University of Missouri Extension. According to Johnson, nutrition experts recommend for long term success that you adopt a healthy eating pattern that fits your preferences. Increase your awareness of major obstacles that often lead to weight gain such as super-sized portions, frequent eating of high fat fast food, too much regular soda or fruit drinks, and lack of physical activity.

To maintain a healthier weight, start by evaluating your own eating

and lifestyle habits, and work on making one change at a time. Johnson indicated another important factor is to accept your body and concede that in midlife and beyond, no one looks exactly like they did in their 20’s. Researchers reported at the 13th Annual Congress on Women’s Health in 2005 that women with this ‘happily imperfect’ mindset are more successful at weight control. Studies at the University of California-Davis also found that changing behavior to accept your body is more effective in the long run to prevent weight gain. The good news is that losing 5 to 10% of your body weight helps lower cholesterol and blood pressure, as well as improved blood sugar regulation. This would translate to an average weight loss of 10 to 15 pounds for the person weighing 200 pounds. Losing 10 pounds is achievable for many people by making some simple lifestyle changes.

Turn the page for seven tips to help you maintain a healthier weight and have more energy.



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7 Tips to help you maintain a healthier weight and have more energy:

1. Eat early

Kick start the day with a power breakfast. The National Weight Loss Registry, which tracks people who have lost more than 30 pounds and kept it off for more than five years, cites eating breakfast as a key strategy for weight control. **Include protein** like yogurt, peanut butter, cottage cheese, an egg, or lean deli-meat so you will feel satisfied longer. Then **add a whole grain** like high fiber cereal or bran muffin; and top it off with fruit and a glass of skim milk.



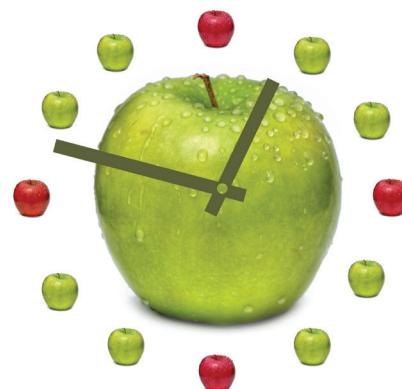
2. Eat bright



Keep healthy by eating a rainbow of color. Research at Penn State University found that eating more high volume, high-fiber foods that are largely water like fruits and vegetables was an important strategy for maintaining a healthier weight, especially if combined with reducing portion size. **Make half your plate 'colorful' with fruits and vegetables:** dark green (broccoli, spinach, romaine); red (tomato, strawberries); orange (citrus fruit, carrots) yellow-orange (squash, melons); purple and blue (grapes, blueberries).

3. Eat regularly

Plan to **eat every 3 to 4 hours** to avoid hunger and overeating. Snack smart to curb the munchies. These sensible snacks provide longer-lasting energy: whole-grain bread with thin slice of low-fat mozzarella cheese; low-fat popcorn; a few almonds or walnuts; sliced apple or banana with peanut butter; carrot sticks with low-fat dip; string cheese and pretzels. Quench your thirst with skim milk, vegetable juices, or water.



4. Eat strong

Keep hunger at bay by including protein in meals and snacks. It's the protein in your meal that leads to a feeling of fullness and satisfaction. **Including lean protein each time you eat will help prevent overeating on desserts and sweets.** Choose from among lean cuts of beef and pork, fish, poultry, dry beans, and low-fat yogurt and cheeses.



5. Eat whole foods

Keep it real, keep it small.

Focus on eating more whole

foods, but smaller portions. Eating

fewer processed foods will help reduce

calories and improve nutrition since many

of these foods are higher in sodium, fat, and

calories. Eating a whole fruit provides more

fiber and thus more ‘eating’ satisfaction. It takes more fruit juice to

feel similarly satisfied, thus more calories. Follow the Dietary Guidelines and **make at least half of your grains,**

whole-grains each day. The whole-grains are rich in fiber, folic acid, and B-vitamins and also keep you satisfied

longer. Keep it small by keeping tabs on portion size. Eat half of what you are served, take home half, or share

with a friend. Think smaller portions whenever and wherever you eat.

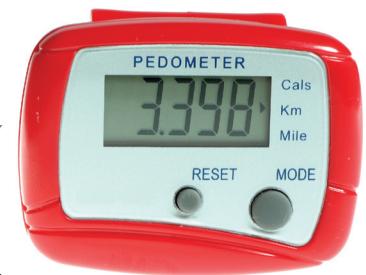


6. Eat slowly & only when hungry

Researchers in the field of weight management indicate **people who pay more attention to internal cues of hunger and fullness are more successful at maintaining a healthy weight.** To lessen weight gain, Weill Medical College of Cornell University encourages people to eat only when hungry, avoid “empty” calories like soda, and eat smaller portions to reduce calories.

7. Move more, move often

Of all the strategies to maintain a healthy weight, physical activity is the most important factor. Weight control is a balancing act – calories in and calories out. Find ways to increase your activity level everyday. **The goal is to move more and sit less.** The Dietary Guidelines recommend about 60 minutes of physical activity most days of the week to help manage weight and prevent weight gain. Yet, this doesn't have to be all at once; you can break it up with 10 to 20 minute walks before and after work. And focus on movement throughout the day. It all adds up whether it means taking the stairs, doing errands on foot, dancing, gardening, or cleaning the house. Pedometers (step counters) are also a great way to monitor your movement and motivate you to find more ways to put “steps” into your day.



The key is to establish lifelong eating habits and find ways to move that you enjoy. There is no easy answer for maintaining a healthy weight. Yet, once you get the mindset of adopting a lifestyle that supports a healthier weight, you can make gradual changes that you can live with and ones that will help you avoid weight gain.