

# Protect Your Heart by Losing Weight

Regular physical activity, like dancing, can help you lose weight. Losing weight lowers your risk of heart disease and stroke because it helps you control blood glucose (sugar), blood pressure, and cholesterol levels. You don't have to lose a lot of weight to see the benefits. Even a loss of 10 to 15 pounds can help a lot.

Weight loss can be hard because it means changing the way you eat and how much activity you get. The older we get, the harder it is for us to lose weight because we burn fewer calories. We also tend to be less active. Losing weight takes time—and that can be frustrating. **The good news is that you can lose weight and keep it off, even if you've never done it before.**

## What strategies can help me lose weight?

Here's what works for people who have lost weight and kept it off:

- They cut back on calories and fat.
- They're physically active most days of the week.
- They eat breakfast every day.
- They keep a record of their weight, what they eat and drink, and what they do for physical activity.

The more of these you can fit into your weight loss plan, the more likely you will succeed. It's important to both eat fewer calories and be more active.

## What's the secret to changing habits?

Every change involves several stages, and each stage is important. Here's an example.

1. Sue decided she wanted to lose some weight.
2. She thought about ways she could cut calories and exercise more. She decided that she wasn't ready for all of her ideas. But for some, she was ready.
3. At the time, she ate ice cream almost every night for her snack. She knew that one way to lower calories would be to eat something with fewer calories than ice cream. She decided that this was a change she was ready, willing, and able to make. She saved changes she wasn't ready, willing, and able to make until another time.



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4. Next, Sue made a realistic plan. She'd have an apple instead of ice cream at least 4 times a week.
5. Then she took action. She bought some apples and started eating an apple for her evening snack 4 times a week.
6. Now, after more than 6 months, it's part of her routine and she's ready to try another change.

Think about a change you'd like to make. Decide what you're ready, willing and able to do. Then plan exactly how and when you'll do it.

## Strategies for losing weight

Now it's time to get started. Put a check mark next to the things you're ready, willing, and able to do. Or write down your own ideas. Choose at least one eating goal and at least one exercise goal.

### How to cut back on calories and fat

- Eat smaller servings of high-calorie favorites.
- Split a main dish with a friend or family member when eating out. Or take some home for another meal.
- Ask for salad dressings and sauces "on the side" and then use as little as possible.
- Include a fruit or a vegetable with every meal or snack.

- Cook in lower-calorie ways: roast, broil, grill, microwave, steam, or bake. Use nonstick pans or cooking sprays.
- Cut back on high-calorie toppings, such as butter, margarine, sour cream, regular salad dressing, mayonnaise, or gravy. Instead, season your food with herbs, spices, salsa, lemon juice, or other low-calorie choices.
- Check food labels. Choose foods with fewer calories than your usual choices.
- Keep serving sizes small for snacks. And, eat low-calorie snacks such as popcorn, pretzels, raw veggies, and fruit.
- Other things I can do: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### How to be more physically active

- Take a 30-minute walk every day. Or split up your daily activity. Try a 10-minute walk after each meal. Start off with a 10- to 15-minute walk every other day, then little by little walk farther and walk more often.
- Find an activity you enjoy. Swim, dance, bike, or do the exercises on a TV fitness show.
- Be active around the house. Work in the yard, play with the kids, get up to change the TV channel, and walk around while you talk on the phone.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Walk or ride your bike instead of driving whenever you can.
- Park at the far end of the parking lot and walk to the store or mall entrance.
- Other things I can do: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### How to keep a record of your progress

- Keep track of your weight loss efforts. Many people find that writing everything down helps keep them on target.
- Keep a small notebook with you all day.
- Write down everything you eat and drink. Include the serving size. Some people set target levels of calories or grams of fat and keep track of their daily totals.
- Make a note of what kind of physical activity you've done and for how long.
- You may want to check your weight once a week and write it down.

### How a support system can help

Many people find it helpful to meet each week with people who are also trying to lose weight. Think about joining a group for weight loss, exercise, or general support. Or create your own support system by talking with friends and family about your successes and your struggles. Find a walking buddy or friends who also want to improve their health. Then work together to reach your goals.

For more help, ask your health care team for copies of these titles:

- Toolkit No. 4: *Learning How to Change Habits*
- Toolkit No. 5: *All About Physical Activity*
- Toolkit No. 8: *Protect Your Heart: Make Smart Food Choices*
- Toolkit No. 18: *Getting Started with Physical Activity for People with Diabetes*



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