Developing Personal Strategies to Promote Healthy Behavior & Wellness

Do you want to lose weight but you're finding it hard to reach your goals? If so, there's good news! There are many simple things you can add to your daily routine right now to get started on the path to a weight that's healthy for you.

Set a Strong Goal
Start by setting a goal that is specific, measurable, and achievable over a set period of time. Work with your health care provider to set goals that will work with what you enjoy and what you want to get out of your weight-wellness journey.

Instead of "I want to lose weight," try something like, "I want to lose one pound per week." Having a specific goal that is doable will help you come up with a plan you can stick with. And if it's measurable, it will help you track your progress so you can make changes, if needed.

Define the Steps You Will Take
Once you set your goal, it's time to figure out the steps you will take to reach it. These are the behaviors you will start doing (or cut back on)—and it's where the magic really happens. Focus on adding healthier behaviors instead of depriving yourself.

So, if your goal is to lose one pound per week, you might focus on behaviors like:

- Keep a food journal to track your food choices and make healthy changes, if necessary
- Be physically active for 30 minutes 5 days a week to have more energy and feel better
- Use the Diabetes Plate, a method that helps you create healthy meals by filling a nine-inch plate with 1/2 non-starchy vegetables, ¼ with protein, and ¼ with high-fiber carbs
- Snack on protein and vegetables that will keep you full for longer
- Drink zero-calorie beverages that will hydrate you without adding extra calories

Figure Out the *"How"*

Setting a goal and deciding what you will do to reach it are important first steps—but that's not all. How you will make changes happen is really important.

For example, you might want to start tracking what you eat each day. Ask yourself how you will make it happen and think about your options, such as:

- Will you download an app to help you?
- Will you write down what you eat in a notebook?
- Is there another way that works for you?
- What day will you start tracking?
- Is there a specific goal you'll try to meet, like eating a certain amount of calories or vegetables each day?

Other tips:

- **Make sure your goals are realistic.** If you have had a plan in place for a few weeks and haven't made progress, adjust the goal or the steps you will take so you can and will do them.

- **Move the goalposts.** If setting a goal to reach six months from now feels too far away to be motivating, try setting a smaller goal to reach after one month.

- **Try habit-forming strategies:**

  - **Daily routines:** Making changes can be hard at first simply because we aren't used to them. Try adding the new activities to what you already do every day. This will help them feel more natural. For example, if you are trying to be more active, park your car at the back of the parking lot to increase your steps.

  - **Piggybacking:** If there are small things you want to do every day, try doing them with something else you're already doing. For example, if you want to drink more water, plan to have a big glass while your coffee brews in the morning.

  - **Temptation bundling:** If you want to start doing something you don't really enjoy, try pairing it with something you do. For example, if you don't love exercising but you do love watching reality TV, get moving while watching your favorite show.
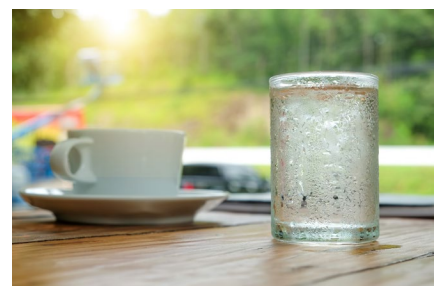
- **Plan ahead to manage challenges.** There will be times when you have challenges, like going on a vacation, where there will be a lot of dining out and sitting around.

  Make a plan before you go for how you will eat healthily and move so you can enjoy yourself while also staying on track with your goals.

- **Make sure a slip doesn't turn into a slide.** The way we think matters a lot. One of the most common reasons we stop working toward goals is because we have a "slip."

  But here's a fact: Slip-ups will happen many times and one of the best things you can do is shift how you think about them. Imagine someone planned to eat two cookies but ended up eating four. When this sort of thing happens, instead of being hard on yourself, try to think about it in a way that gets you back to working toward your goals.

  One approach would to be to think, "That was more than I planned to eat so I'll pay closer attention to how I eat for the rest of the day."

- **Get support from others.** There are so many ways other people can help when you're trying to lose weight. Try finding a workout buddy or making healthier dinners with your whole family.

  And simply talking to people you trust about the changes you are making can help you stick with them and get back on track when you struggle.

▪ **Celebrate.** Change often takes more time than we would like. Focusing on what is going well can help you stay on track when progress is slower than you hoped.

 Try these tips:

> **Once a day**, remind yourself why you want to lose weight and get healthier. What good things will come—or are already coming?

> **Once a week**, write down three things you will do over the next seven days to stay (or get back) on track. If you're feeling a bit bored with the food you're eating or how you're getting physical activity, mix it up and try something new you're excited about!

> **Once a month (or more)**, think about how the steps you've taken are changing more than your weight.
  ▪ Do you have more energy?
  ▪ Are you less out of breath when you go up steps?
  ▪ Are you sleeping better?

Celebrate these changes!

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