



WEIGHT LOSS

A CHANGE IN LIFESTYLE

In order to reduce weight and maintain the weight loss requires a change in lifestyle. This change is small but essential. The changes to your behaviour with food are vital and need to be permanent, but are achievable for most people.

WHY DO WE GAIN WEIGHT?

Weight gain is a simple calculation between the energy in put (food) minus energy output (living + exercise). Any surplus balance is stored as fat, and a negative balance results in pre-existing fat stores being utilized (and thus causing weight loss).

Often under appreciated is what makes the biggest difference to our energy balance. The biggest determinant of our energy balance is how much we eat, and not exercise or necessarily what we eat. An average sized man running 10km will consume the equivalent in energy terms of having a coffee and cake from a local coffee shop. Exercise and maintaining a balanced diet are important but are not the critical factor in weight loss.

Furthermore the biggest determinant of how much we eat is our appetite. We have evolved to reward ourselves for eating high-energy foods, as we have been designed to eat berries and chase our prey all day, and not to get our next meal from the local supermarket. Consequently it is pleasurable to eat, and the reason why it is difficult to lose weight.

Most diets fail, as the energy balance is not maintained after the diet has finished, as the old eating habits develop – that is why changes in the behaviour of food need to be permanent, as then the energy balance will be maintained and the weight will remain off.

BE REALISTIC

What is your goal weight? Many people aim to get down to a 'perfect' weight. This is often unrealistic and may never be achieved. If the weight that you aim for is too low, you are likely to become fed up about slow progress, and give up. To lose 5 kg is good. To lose 10 kg is excellent. (10 kg is about one and a half stone.)

Top tip - in most cases, most health benefits come from losing the first 5- 10% of your weight. This is often about 5-10 kg.

TIMESCALE

If you lose more than a kilogram per week, you may lose muscle tissue rather than fat. It is best to lose an average of 1/2-1 kg per week (about 1-2 lb per week). To do this you need to eat 500-1000 calories (a coffee and cake often) per day less than you did before your diet. You will lose 6-12 kg if you keep this up for three months. Don't be disheartened by minor increases or leveling off in weight for a few days. Look for the overall trend over several months.

Top tip - aim to lose weight steadily for about three months.

FOOD DIARIES

It is helpful to know how much you normally eat. Estimating from memory is not very accurate. It is best to keep a diary, and write down every amount of food and drink that you have over a week or so. Include even the smallest of snacks. Add up the number of calories that you eat and drink each day. You may need advice from a practice nurse or dietician to calculate calories. However, there are plenty of books that give calorie counts for different foods. It may be helpful to keep up the diary for several weeks to see the difference in calories that you eat before and after a change to a healthier diet. To lose weight, you must eat fewer calories each day than previously. It is important to include drinks within your calorie count.

HOW TO LOOSE WEIGHT

It is important to plan ahead. Perhaps you could plan each day's meals and recipes the day before. In this way you will know exactly how much food you will be eating. This is better than looking in the cupboard and fridge before mealtimes or snacks to see what is there.

It is best to separate eating from other activities, as this helps to you keep to your planned eating for the day. So, try not to eat whilst on the move, whilst watching TV, during meetings, etc.

CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOUR WITH FOOD

- Eat Less. Try to deliberately take smaller portions when you have a meal. Do not feel that you have to 'empty your plate'. Perhaps change the plates that you have in your cupboard (which may be large) to more medium sized plates. In this way you will naturally serve up smaller portions.
- Before having a meal, drink a pint of water 30 minutes beforehand, as this will distend your stomach and reduce your appetite. Your appetite is directly governed by hormones that are realised in response to stretching of the stomach. Stretching the stomach results in your appetite being turned off. Unfortunately this process takes 20-30 minutes, which makes it easy to over-eat.
- Eat slowly, this will give time for the food to reach your stomach and reduce your appetite, remember to chew your food 20 times.
- Stop eating when you are not full. Over time your stomach will shrink, and thus your appetite will reduce.
- What do you have for snacks? Try changing chocolates and cakes for fruit.
- Skipping meals is usually a bad idea. It sounds a good idea, but many people just become hungry, and have snacks later in the day, and eat too much at the next meal. Eating at regular mealtimes may be a first important change. Three healthy meals a day is best.
- Do you always have a pudding? Skip desert or have a yoghurt instead

DRINK WATER

Many people use drinks full of calories to quench their thirst. Sugary drinks such as cola, tea and coffee with milk and sugar, milk, and alcoholic drinks, all contain calories. One of the easiest ways to cut back on calories is simply to drink water as your main drink.

Top tip - keep some water in a plastic bottle in the fridge. Chilled water is surprisingly refreshing.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

If you are able, aim to do at least 60-90 minutes of moderate physical activity on at least five days a week. (All adults should aim for at least 30 minutes on five days a week. However, 60-90 minutes is recommended if you are overweight or obese and are aiming to lose weight.) Moderate physical activity includes: brisk walking, jogging, dancing, swimming, badminton, tennis, etc. In addition, try to do more in your daily routines. For example, use stairs instead of lifts, walk or cycle to work or school, etc.

TEMPTING SITUATIONS

It is important to recognise that holidays, festivals, eating out, etc, may interfere with your everyday food choices and eating schedule. Also, do you find that watching food programs on TV makes you hungry? How about smells from the kitchen from someone cooking who is not aware that you are trying to lose weight? Do you get pressure from family or friends to eat or drink more? You will be tempted by different situations to abandon your planned food intake. Can you identify any tempting situations? Can you avoid them? If not, how do you cope with them?

Top tip - go and clean your teeth when you are tempted to eat between meals.

MAINTAINING WEIGHT LOSS

Many people who lose weight soon put it back on again when they stop their weight reducing diet. The main reason this happens is because the weight reducing diet was only a temporary cut back of an unhealthy diet. Once you have lost some weight, to keep the weight off you need to stick to a healthy diet. An active lifestyle with more physical activity would also help. Even better is for the whole family or household to have changed to healthy eating habits and a healthy lifestyle.

To keep your weight down you will still need to eat less and/or do more physical activity than previously. For example, if you have lost 10kg, to keep this off and maintain your weight you will still need to:

- eat about 300 calories per day less than you did prior to the weight loss diet, or do more physical activity to 'burn up' an extra 300 calories per day, or a combination of the two.