

71 Weight Loss Tips That Really Work

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Get Moving

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The tough part with exercise, of course, is getting out there and doing it. Here's how the successful get going:

1. Prioritize. The beds might not get made, but Amy Reed, 36, still make time for exercise. That's how she's kept off more than 80 pounds for 13 years. "I have to schedule it in and let go of other things -- like a perfectly clean house," she says.
2. Find a passion. "I have a dance background and when I found jazzercise, I said, 'Thank God.' If somebody told me I had to go out and run five days a week, I'd still weigh 185 pounds," says Anne Geren, 41, who lost 55 pounds and has kept it off for 13 years.
3. Keep an exercise log. It makes you more accountable. Norma from Dallas, TX, who hangs hers on the refrigerator, checks off six workouts a week dutifully. "If I miss one day, I make that my day off for the week."
4. Set a goal. Sign up for some fun runs and try to improve your times. "I went from a 5-K to a 4-miler, then a 5-miler, then a 10-K. As I was building miles and speed, I was getting fitter and losing more weight," says Therese Revitt, 42, who lost 80 pounds and recently ran a marathon.
5. Get pumped. "It wasn't until I put on more muscle through resistance training that I was able to keep the weight off -- almost effortlessly," says Verona Mucci-Hurlburt, 37, who went from a size 18 to an 8. The reason? Muscle burns more calories around the clock.

Eat Smart

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6. Make changes for the long haul. "I learned how to eat and live with it for the rest of my life," says Barbara Miltenberger, 42, who lost more than 40 pounds and hasn't seen any come back in three years.

7. Stop dieting. "The best thing I did was quit dieting," says Reed. "I'd always find ways to cheat. So instead, I stopped forbidding myself certain foods and just started eating less of them."

8. Get a grip on reality. "When I started keeping a food diary, I discovered that I was eating somewhere between 3,000 and 4,000 calories a day," says Rebecca, 46, who found the number shocking.

9. Eat minimeals. Having smaller, more frequent meals can prevent you from getting ravenously hungry and overeating. On average, weight loss winners eat five times a day.

10. Follow the 90% to 10% rule. "If you watch what you eat 90% of the time, the other 10% is not a problem," says Mucci-Hurlburt, who learned this tip from a fitness professional.

11. Dine at the dinner table only. If you eat in front of the TV, then every time you nestle in with the remote control, it's a cue to eat. Instead, designate an eating spot for all meals and snacks. "Even when I want potato chips, I set the table just like I was going to sit down for a full course meal," says Kathy Wilson, 47, who took off more than 100 pounds. "I put a handful of chips on the plate, put the bag away, and then sit down to eat. I never just stand at the counter and eat now."

12. Think before you bite. Creating rituals – like Wilson did or the old standby of waiting 10 minutes before giving into a craving -- can stop you from eating when you really aren't hungry. "Nine chances out of 10 the chips go back in the cupboard, and I just walk away," says Wilson.

13. Drink up. "Drinking lots of water keeps me from snacking when I'm not hungry, and it gives me more energy," says Revitt. "It also stopped what I thought were hunger headaches, which were probably due to dehydration. "

Set Yourself Up for Success

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14. Do it for yourself. "My doctor told me for years that I had to take the weight off. But you've got to want it yourself," says Wilson. "As long as somebody else is pushing you, no matter what you do or what you try, it'll never work," adds Victoria Bennett, 39, who shed 60 pounds and has kept them off for five years.

15. Take it slow. We all want to lose it yesterday, but slow is the way to go if you don't want to see those pounds again. "It took me a year to lose 100 pounds this time," says Rebecca, who's kept it off for eight years. "I had lost 100 pounds twice before, in less than six months each time, but I didn't maintain it."

16. Customize your approach. What worked for your best friend may not work for you. And what works for you today may not work six months from now. You need to decide what you need. Mucci-Hurlburt joined a structured program for accountability. "I needed to know that I was going to get weighed each week," she says. But for others that's exactly what they don't need.

17. Learn from the past. Everyone we talked to had tried to lose weight before. Part of their success this time was that they learned from past failures. "Before, the more I focused on weighing, measuring, and preparing food, the more I ate," says Wilson, who finally succeeded with a program that offered prepackaged foods.

18. Set small goals. "My first goal was to lose only 10 pounds," says Rebecca. "I had very high blood pressure, and my doctor said if I would just lose 10 pounds, he believed that I could get off the pills. Every other doctor before said I had to lose 100 pounds, and I thought 'I can't do that.' But 10 pounds, I thought 'maybe I can do that.' Doing it one bite at a time made it more achievable for me."

19. Make changes you can live with. "Before I'd go to bed I'd ask myself, 'Is what I did today something I could do for the rest of my life?' If I felt deprived, I'd do it differently tomorrow. If I thought, 'Yeah, I could do this tomorrow,' then I was on the right track," says Revitt.

Control Portions

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20. Go back to school. Joining a weight loss class or working with a dietitian can help you learn proper portions, even without weighing and measuring.

"If you get a half cup of cottage cheese, it should look like a tennis ball, a quarter cup should look like a Ping-Pong ball," says Wilson. "Now, I know what appropriate portions look like."

21. Don't toss those measuring cups, though. "I usually misjudge portions of salad dressing, mayonnaise, and ice cream," says Revitt. "They're really high in fat and calories and cause the most damage if overdone. So I still measure them."

22. Cook for your family, not an army. Even for low-fat foods like grilled chicken, Bennett stopped overfeeding her family of four. "I stopped making six or seven breasts, thinking that everybody had to have two or three," she says. "Now I make just one for each person."

Take Some Cooking Lessons

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23. Plan ahead. An empty fridge after a stressful day begs for pizza. The now-slender crew doesn't leave meals to chance. Many of them plan their menus a week or more in advance. Others even cook ahead, freezing meals for the week in individual containers.

24. A little dab will do it. If you just can't pass on some high-fat favorites, stick to the most flavorful ones. "A single slice of bacon is enough to flavor eggs or a potato," says Helen Fitzgerald, 61, who lost about 51 pounds. Her husband's lost more than 150 pounds.

25. Fake fry. Try "frying" with calorie-free cooking sprays instead of oil. Spray sliced potatoes and roast them in the oven for french fries that taste fried without the fat, suggests Miltenberger.

26. Stock frozen veggies. With pasta or stir-fry sauces, they are diet saviors. "I've been known to eat a whole bag of vegetables -- and with only a quarter cup of sauce, it's only about 3 grams of fat," says Mucci-Hurlburt. "It's saved my butt many times when I was really hungry and had to eat now."

27. Flavor up. Rice, beans, and other cooked grains are the staples of many successful dieters. For variety, Fitzgerald cooks them in different liquids -- tomato juice, apple juice, beef or chicken stock. "Rice done in pineapple juice is especially good for rice puddings and Chinese dishes," she says.

Don't Go It Alone

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28. Find the right support person. A nag won't do. Neither will a partner in crime. Look for someone who can empathize and support you in a positive way. When Reed finally succeeded in losing weight, her fiancé was a big help. "We didn't focus all our socializing around food. We went bike riding a lot and played tennis instead of going for pizza."

29. Join a support group. "Hearing someone say she lost 50 pounds would be real motivating," says Revitt. "I'd think, 'She's just a normal person like me. If she can lose 50 then I can do it too.'"

30. Create your own group. "I started my first women's group when I first started exercising. It was just a bunch of women that got together once a week, and we would compare notes," says Debra Mazda, 44, who's 135 pounds slimmer than she was 13 years ago.

Don't Boycott Dining Out

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31. Be picky. "I'm not afraid to ask for dishes to be prepared differently," says Bennett. "My philosophy is that every restaurant has a grill and an oven. They don't have to fry everything."

32. It's not the Last Supper. This is not your last chance in life to have a particular food. "Those french fries will be there in a half hour if I really have to have them," says Mucci-Hurlburt. Or they'll be there next week.

33. Don't wait to doggy bag. "As soon as the waitress puts the food down in front of me I cut the whole portion in half, put it on my butter plate, and ask her to wrap it," says Revitt. If you wait until the end of your meal, oftentimes you pick at it until the waitress returns.

34. Tackle buffets. "I get only one tablespoon of everything," says Rebecca. "Usually I don't even fill my plate, but I at least taste everything so I don't feel deprived."

Deliver Yourself from Temptation

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35. Stay busy. Do something that's not conducive to eating. The folks we talked to aren't sitting around thinking of hot fudge sundaes. They're singing in choirs, taking classes, running marathons, leading weight loss groups, and more.

36. Keep 'em out of sight. Overwhelmingly, weight loss vets control foods like chocolate, ice cream, and potato chips by not having them around. "It's easier to fill the house with treats for my kids that I don't like such as Oreo cookies," says 30 year old Tammy Hansen, who trimmed off 60 pounds.

37. Moderation is key. But they're not depriving themselves, either. "If I want a piece of cake, I'll have one," says Mazda. "Then I just won't have another one for a week or so. Knowing that I can eat something and no one's going to say 'you can't' works for me."

38. Indulge and enjoy! Go for the best brand of ice cream or the best cut of steak. "If I'm going to blow 500 or 600 calories, I want to make sure that I'm enjoying it to the max," says Mucci-Hurlburt. "Often desserts look much better than they taste. If it tastes like cardboard, forget it. It's not worth it."

39. Limit portions. "When I have to snack, I put my hand in the bag or box and whatever I can grab, that's what I eat -- only a handful," says Fitzgerald.

40. Buy individually packaged snacks. Cookies, chips, even ice cream come in single serving sizes. "If I want some cookies or chips, I grab one little bag instead of a whole box," says Reed.

41. Keep reminders around. A note on the refrigerator reading "Stop" kept Reed from raiding it. Underneath she listed other things to do, like "take a drink of water" and questions such as "Are you really hungry?"

42. Find alternatives. Chocolate is still a favorite even for successful dieters. But they've found ways to enjoy it and still keep their waistlines. Bennett makes fat-free chocolate pudding with skim milk. For Sarah, who lost 40 pounds and has kept it off for two years, a cup of sugar-free hot cocoa (about 20 calories), topped with a little fat-free whipped cream does the trick.

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43. Don't give in to peer pressure. If the cookies, chips, or ice cream you buy for the rest of the family is sabotaging your efforts, stop buying it. "My daughters carried on for about a month, but after that they got used to the change," says Bennett.

Escape Emotional Eating

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44. Know your triggers. You have to know which moods send you to the cookie jar before you can do anything about it. Once you know your triggers, have a list of alternate things to do when the mood strikes. "When I get tired or discouraged, I get an 'I don't care attitude,'" says Rebecca. For those times, taking a walk or reading affirmations can help.

45. Quiz yourself. Determine if you're really hungry or eating for other reasons. "I'll ask myself 'Do you really want this, or is it something else, like boredom or depression?' About 80% of the time it's not hunger," says Geren.

46. Call a friend. Talking about what's eating you can keep you from eating. "I had to be willing to call my support people at 9 o'clock on a Friday night," says Barbara, 46, who's kept off 46 pounds for more than 15 years.

47. Stop worrying. Remind yourself that you only have control over you -- not your spouse, boss, parents, or friends. If you can't do anything about it, just let it go, several people suggested.

48. Take an emotional inventory. Ask yourself: "What do you feel guilty about? resent? fear? regret? What are you angry about?" Then deal with it, says Barbara. Confront the person involved, talk to others, or write a letter -- even if you don't send it.

49. Get spiritual. If religion isn't for you, try yoga, meditation, or relaxation exercises. These are especially helpful if you tend to eat when you're stressed, says Barbara.

50. Challenge the power of food. Ice cream is a poor companion if you're lonely. "If I eat the whole bag of chocolate chip cookies, am I going to be any happier? Probably not," says Wilson.

Blast Off a Plateau

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51. Up the ante "I started out walking, and eventually tried running, which was the key to my success," says Revitt. "I couldn't even make it around one lap (1/26of a mile) in the beginning, but it was just enough to make the weight loss continue."

52. Go back to basics. "I'd go back to more strict measuring because you can sneak away from reasonable portions and start fooling yourself," says Mucci-Hurlburt.

53. Stop starving yourself. "As soon as I saw the weight coming off, I thought, 'If it's working at this rate, I'll try eating less so I'll lose more,'" admits Miltenberger. "Then I'd stall or even put weight on because I was undereating and my metabolism slowed. I'd start losing again when I'd eat a little bit more."

54. Look how far you've come. "By keeping a graph of my weight, I could see that the line would go up and down and up and down, but overall it was going down, so there was no reason to throw my progress away," says Rebecca.

Stay Motivated

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55. Don't give up. "There are plenty of times when I've wanted to give up, but I didn't," says Mazda. "I realized a long time ago that entrepreneurs fall and rise up every time they lose a venture, but they just keep getting up." The same is true for weight loss.

56. "You can do it." Repeat this to yourself. Many people post affirmations around their homes or offices as constant reminders. One dieter even programmed her computer screen to keep her on the right track.

57. Get inspired. "I read a lot about other people who have come back from obstacles and really made it," says Mazda. Their determination can make you feel like you can succeed too.

58. Envision your svelte self. "If you can actually visualize yourself as the person you want to be, you'll become it," says Wilson. "When I felt like I couldn't do this one more minute, I slipped in a motivational tape. Step by step, it would walk me through a visualization exercise so I could see myself as I wanted to be."

59. Find new measures of success. When she lost some weight, trying on her old, too-big clothes further motivated Miltenberger. "I also bought myself a size below what I was wearing," she says. "I'd see if I could get the pants on, then if I could zip them, and finally when I could wear them comfortably."

Feel Good About Yourself

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60. Learn to like your trouble spots. Peggy Malecha, who's lost about 75 pounds, dresses in a black leotard and, standing in front of a mirror, she points out everything about herself that she doesn't like. Then she counters that. For instance, "I hate my legs, but they work," she says. "I can walk and dance. I have no control over the way they look, so it's silly to obsess over them. Don't dwell on it."

61. Pamper yourself. Take baths and get massages, facials, manicures, and pedicures. "They make me look good and feel good," says Mazda.

62. Stop negative talk. "If you make positive speech a long-term goal and stop using 'I was bad (or good) today,' you'll begin to feel better about yourself," says Mazda.

63. Don't compare yourself to others. Instead, think "I'm better or just as good as anyone else is. Once you start thinking that about yourself, believe me, you get real cocky," says Mazda.

64. Look in the mirror and say, "I look good." You may not believe it now, but you will. "When I first started this, I avoided mirrors," says Bennett. "I never wanted to go into a dressing room, so I'd get various sizes, take them home, and then try them on. If they didn't fit, then I took them back. But now I'll look in every mirror."

Be Realistic

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65. Stay flexible. Many people who have kept the weight off never reached their initial goal weights. Instead, they've gotten to a realistic weight that they can maintain. "In 13 years, I've never gotten down to my initial goal weight, but I'm very happy and feel very good even though I didn't reach it," says Reed.

66. Quit the numbers game. Mucci-Hurlburt is 5' 5 1/2" tall and weighs 152 pounds -- by society's standards she's heavy. However, she can slip into a size 8 thanks to the fact that most of her weight is muscle. "It doesn't matter what the scale says, it matters how I look," she says.

67. Reject others standards. "Thin is whatever you think thin is. Next to Roseanne Barr, I'm thin. Next to Twiggy, I'm fat," says Mazda.

Get Back on Track

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68. Stop being a perfectionist. "Look at it like walking a tightrope," suggests Revitt. "The goal is not just to stay on without falling off. The goal is to get to the other side, and if you know that you can fall off as many times as you want as long as you get back up again, you're gonna be successful."

69. Start fresh, ASAP. If you have a slip, don't wait until Monday or even tomorrow to get back in line. Revitt uses water as a cleansing ritual to end a binge. When she realizes what's happening, she drinks a water to signal that the eating is over, and she's back on track immediately. "It's made my lapses shorter and shorter," she says.

70. Practice early detection. "I weigh myself about once a month," says Reed. "If I start inching up, I increase my exercise a little bit."

71. Enlist professional help. Many of the people we talked to used dietitians, personal trainers, and even psychologists to help them deal with problems that were hindering their efforts.

If you feel like you can't do it on your own, seek help.