



12 TIPS FOR Healthy Weight Loss

A straightforward, plant-based approach that delivers lasting benefits far beyond the scale.

★ BY MICHELLE McMACKEN, MD

As an internal medicine physician and director of an obesity program, I am all too familiar with the struggle that many people face when it comes to weight loss. The statistics in my primary care practice mirror the U.S. national numbers: More than 70 percent of us are overweight or obese. I've seen many people attempt to lose weight, become frustrated and disheartened, and turn to supplements, pills, meal replacements, unhealthy fad diets, and surgery. Unfortunately, most of these are short-term solutions that end with the extra weight returning, often accompanied by troubling health consequences.

The mechanisms that regulate our body weight are highly complex—neurologic, genetic, hormonal, environmental, social, and even microbiologic factors are at play. But these factors do not necessarily determine our destiny! We have the power to override them with the food and lifestyle choices we make every day. Please find in this e-book 12 of my favorite weight-loss tips.

"I'm 46 and now eat a totally plant-based diet. The recipes are awesome, and it has been truly life changing! I went from 215 pounds to 178 just by diet and staying active."

—Jim Lichtenberg,
Ohio

1. Start crowding out animal products, high-fat and processed foods.

Gradually add more whole plant foods to your diet. You can begin with plant foods you already like and build from there. Eat a whole plant food (such as a piece of fruit) or a dish made from whole plants (such as a vegetable or bean soup or a salad) before one of your usual meals so that you won't have as much room for the less-healthy foods. If you're ready to make the full leap to a whole-food, plant-based diet, you will likely see benefits even faster. Consider trying one of the many plant-based/vegan "kickstart" programs available online or in print.

2. Focus on the positive.

Turn your attention to savoring new flavors (this is what I call "taste-bud rehab"), rather than focusing your mental energy on the unhealthy foods you are trying to remove from your diet.

3. Choose the right kind of carbs.

Avoid processed carbs, such as white bread, white rice, and white pastas, even if they are vegan/plant-based. Stick to whole plant foods in their most natural form—brown or wild rice, quinoa, barley, oats, sweet potatoes,

beans, lentils, and, of course, an abundance of colorful vegetables and fruits.

4. Remember that oil is a processed food.

Oil is very dense in calories, so it can easily sabotage your weight-loss efforts. Oil-based salad dressings, for example, dramatically increase the calories in a salad.



★ *Nachos Baked Potato*



"I've lost 17.5 pounds, my Type II Diabetes is well under control, I have more energy and feel great—not only physically but mentally."
—Nancy Feagans, California

★ Strawberry Pistachio Salad

5. Avoid liquid calories.

Don't drink your calories, especially in the form of sports drinks, sodas, other sweetened beverages, and alcohol. The calories in these drinks add up fast and don't fill you up. And for weight loss, in my experience, eating whole fruit trumps drinking fruit juice. Water is the only beverage we actually need.

6. Have conversations with your family and/or close friends.

Talk to the people you live with about how they can best support your weight-loss efforts. Many of us have cravings for certain junk foods and/or sugary desserts, and when these items are readily available in the kitchen, it's pretty challenging to resist them. Ideally, family members will be on board with not bringing these foods into your house. In my practice, I encourage patients to bring their partners and other family members to their appointments with them, so we can talk about behavior changes together.

7. Track positive behaviors.

Keep track of positive changes so you can look back and see the progress you are making. Many of these changes

have important health benefits, independent of weight loss. Also, keep in mind that losing just 5 percent of your body weight can have significant health benefits if you're overweight or obese.

8. Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

Your daily activity can be as simple as walking. Although dietary changes tend to be more effective than exercise for weight loss, exercise is key to preventing weight regain and has numerous other health benefits.



★ Minestrone Soup

9. Eat as mindfully as you can.

Whenever possible, avoid reading or using technology (television, computer, phone, gaming, etc.) while eating. Savor each bite, and focus on the experience of tasting your food.

10. Pay attention to your hunger cues.

Rate your hunger on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very full and 10 being extremely hungry. Don't let yourself get to a 9 or 10. This may require some planning and keeping healthy snacks at the ready. Eat something when your hunger level reaches 7 or 8, so that you won't become ravenous later and make a desperate, unhealthy food decision.

11. Don't worry if you don't lose weight right away.

The rate at which people lose weight depends on many factors, including activity level, age, muscle mass, health conditions and medications, and of course caloric intake. I don't encourage setting goals around the rate of weight loss. Rather, focus on behavior and health goals, such as cooking



at home more often, eating more servings of whole plant foods, and increasing physical activity. For most people, this approach will result in safe and sustainable weight loss. I'm not a fan of fasting for weight loss, meal-replacement programs, weight-loss pills/supplements, or other practices that are temporary and do not promote long-term health.

12. What if you are already eating plant-based but not losing weight?

Examine whether you are eating refined carbohydrates and other processed foods on a regular basis. Look out for added oils and sugars in your food. Are you eating out at restaurants or ordering take-out regularly? These meals tend to be much higher in calories than homemade versions of similar meals. Finally, consider reducing portions of calorie-dense foods such as dried fruits, nuts, olives, seeds, and avocados.

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The Bottom Line

We've known for a long time, from large-scale observational studies, that vegetarians and vegans consistently have lower body mass indexes and significantly lower rates of obesity compared with omnivores. Research also shows that animal products are linked to weight gain and that plant-based diets are effective for weight loss, without calorie counting or measuring portions. This is likely due in part to the high fiber content, which promotes satiety without excess calories.

Research aside, thousands of personal anecdotal reports and years of clinical experience attest to the fact that people who begin following a whole-food, plant-based diet almost always lose weight, sometimes dramatically!

Probably the most important benefit of following a plant-based diet for weight loss is that it also decreases the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, dementia, certain cancers, and even death. I

know of no other "weight-loss diet" that can make such a claim. As a physician, I don't think we should be separating weight issues from other health risks. I question the wisdom of following a diet (high-protein, low-carb, for example) that might help you lose weight in the short term but increases your chance of having significant health problems later on. ■