

Special Report

Supplement to MAYO CLINIC HEALTH LETTER

Special introductory bonus
for new subscribers

Achieving a healthy weight

Strategies for long-term success

Lately, playing with your grandkids has left you worn out — you just can't keep up with them anymore. You also find it hard to participate in activities you used to enjoy. You suspect your weight may have something to do with it. You also wonder if the added pounds may be affecting your health.

You're right to be concerned. The health implications of carrying excess body fat are well-known. These risks are even greater if you're physically inactive and unfit. Plus, your chances of developing weight-related health problems increase as you get older. Overall, being overweight has many implications for your health and quality of life.

For these reasons, losing weight is a healthy goal for many. The good news is that weight loss that results from even a small reduction in body fat — about 5 percent to 10 percent — may improve your health and reduce your risk of weight-related diseases. Losing weight can also increase your confidence and enable you to be energetic, strong, active and independent.

These health benefits can't be achieved by quick fix, "miracle" diets that focus only on losing pounds. Most people who lose weight in this manner gain it back within a year. Lasting success in managing your weight involves a long-term commitment to building healthy habits that last a lifetime. Healthy eating and physical activity — and staying motivated to continue these — are the building blocks of a healthy lifestyle. The intersection of all three factors is where you achieve a healthy weight.

Here, we'll discuss the fundamentals of weight management as well as some practical tips and strategies to get you started on your lifelong commitment to healthy living.

Do you need to lose weight?

The first step in managing your weight is determining a healthy weight for your body type. Simply put, a healthy weight means you have the right amount of body fat in relation to your overall body mass. Stepping on the scale only tells you your total weight, not how much of your weight is fat.

In addition, the scale doesn't tell you where you're carrying that fat. In determining health risks, both of these factors — the amount of fat and where it's located — are more important than your weight alone.

Although there are ways to determine what percentage of your total weight is actually fat, the procedures tend to be expensive, complicated and vary in accuracy. As an alternative, the National Institutes of Health has adopted an approach to determining a healthy weight based on three factors:

■ **Body mass index** — Body mass index (BMI) is a tool that uses weight and height to estimate body fat. BMI values help determine whether you're at a healthy or unhealthy weight. In some cases, BMI values can be mis-



BMI	Normal		Overweight					Obese				
	19	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	35	40	45	50
Height	Weight in pounds											
4'10"	91	115	119	124	129	134	138	143	167	191	215	239
4'11"	94	119	124	128	133	138	143	148	173	198	222	247
5'0"	97	123	128	133	138	143	148	153	179	204	230	255
5'1"	100	127	132	137	143	148	153	158	185	211	238	264
5'2"	104	131	136	142	147	153	158	164	191	218	246	273
5'3"	107	135	141	146	152	158	163	169	197	225	254	282
5'4"	110	140	145	151	157	163	169	174	204	232	262	291
5'5"	114	144	150	156	162	168	174	180	210	240	270	300
5'6"	118	148	155	161	167	173	179	186	216	247	278	309
5'7"	121	153	159	166	172	178	185	191	223	255	287	319
5'8"	125	158	164	171	177	184	190	197	230	262	295	328
5'9"	128	162	169	176	182	189	196	203	236	270	304	338
5'10"	132	167	174	181	188	195	202	209	243	278	313	348
5'11"	136	172	179	186	193	200	208	215	250	286	322	358
6'0"	140	177	184	191	199	206	213	221	258	294	331	368
6'1"	144	182	189	197	204	212	219	227	265	302	340	378
6'2"	148	186	194	202	210	218	225	233	272	311	350	389
6'3"	152	192	200	208	216	224	232	240	279	319	359	399
6'4"	156	197	205	213	221	230	238	246	287	328	369	410

Source: National Institutes of Health, 1998. Note: Asians with a BMI of 23 or higher may have an increased risk of health problems.

Write it down

Keeping accurate records is an important part of a weight management plan.

Food diaries have shown to be a successful tool in helping people reach and maintain their weight goals. Studies suggest that keeping a diary causes people to reduce their food intake, probably by increasing awareness of their eating behavior.

If you have to see it in writing, you may be less likely to sneak in that extra cookie.

leading. For example, muscle weighs more than fat, so some athletes and physically fit people have high BMIs, even though they have very little excess fat. For most people, though, BMI is a helpful tool in estimating weight-related health risks. If your BMI is less than 18.5, talk with your doctor to determine if your low weight is a cause for concern.

- *Waist circumference* — Determining where your body stores fat is important, since many diseases associated with excess weight are influenced by the location of fat on your body. If you carry most of your fat around your waist or upper abdomen, you're considered apple-shaped. If you carry most of your fat around your hips and thighs or lower body, you're referred to as pear-shaped. Apple shapes have greater health risks because excess fat in your abdomen increases your risk of disease.

Measuring your waist will help you determine whether you're carrying too much weight around your middle. Using a flexible measuring tape, find the highest point on each hipbone and measure around your body just above these points. In combination with your BMI, your waist measurement can indicate your risk of weight-related diseases.

- *Medical history* — An evaluation of your personal and family medical histories is also important in determining your healthy weight.

Is your health at risk?

If your BMI is less than 18.5, talk with your doctor. You may be at risk of health conditions associated with a low body weight. A BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 is considered a healthy range, but Asians with a BMI of 23 or more may have an increased risk of health problems. If your BMI is higher, see below.

Obesity-related risk of disease

		Your waist measurement	
		Women: 35 inches or less Men: 40 inches or less	Women: Over 35 inches Men: Over 40 inches
Overweight	25-29.9	Increased risk	High risk
	30-34.9	High risk	Very high risk
Obese	35-39.9	Very high risk	Very high risk
	40 or over	Extremely high risk	Extremely high risk

Source: National Institutes of Health, 2000

Health effects of excess body fat

Two out of three Americans are overweight or obese, and the health implications are significant. Being overweight can increase your risk of developing diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, gallstones and many types of cancer.

Carrying around extra weight also puts added strain on your joints, back and legs. This can exacerbate conditions such as arthritis and increase the likelihood you will need joint replacement surgery.

If you have a family history of obesity or weight-related diseases, you may also be at increased risk. Other factors to consider are any health conditions you have and if you smoke and lead a sedentary lifestyle.

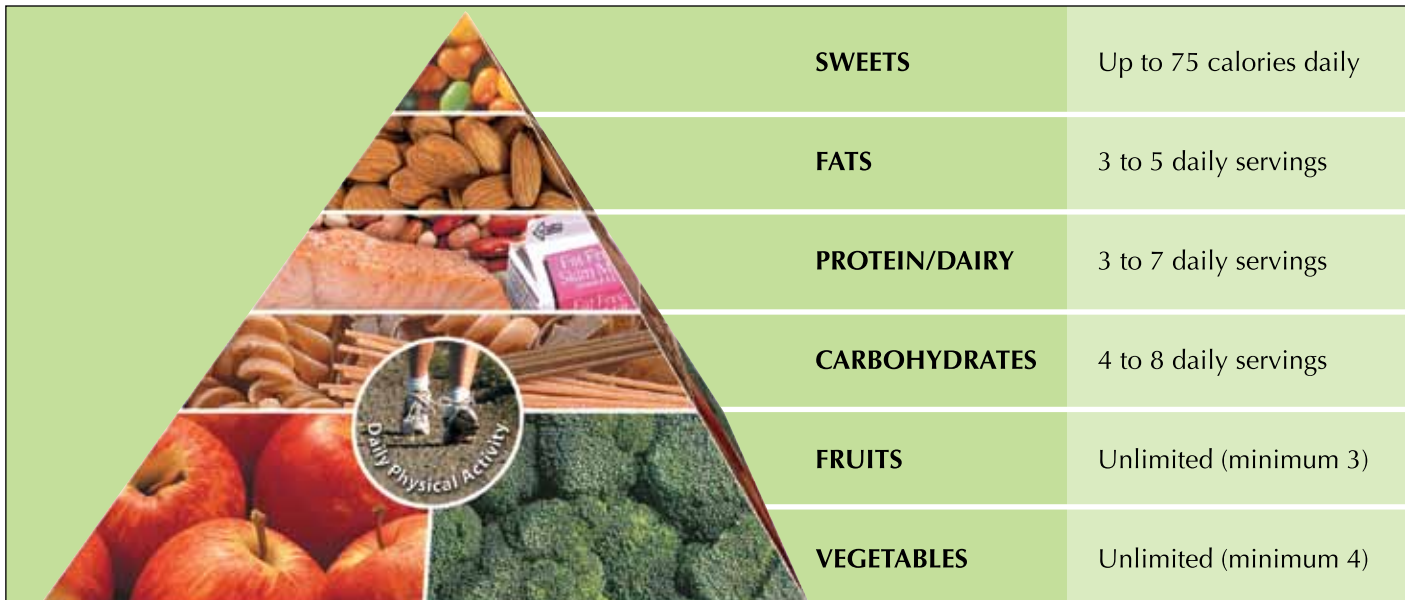
Considered together, your BMI, waist measurement and medical history can help you determine what weight is healthy for you. Talk with your doctor to decide whether losing weight would reduce your risk of certain conditions. For some people who are severely overweight — a BMI over 40 — and have a health problem as a result, surgery may be an option. However, surgery alone won't solve a weight problem. Success depends on your commitment to healthy eating and an active lifestyle to ensure that the weight stays off.

Even if your weight is within a healthy range, you may still benefit from adopting a healthy lifestyle if you haven't done so already. Healthy eating can reduce your risk of certain diseases regardless of your weight. A balanced, healthy lifestyle can improve your sense of well-being. Eating nutritious foods and engaging in regular physical activity is good advice for everyone, at any age, even if you don't need to lose weight.

Fundamentals of healthy eating

How would you like to enjoy an eating plan that includes delicious meals, convenience in the kitchen, optimum nutrition and allows you to eat your favorite foods? It sounds too good to be true — but it's not. A healthy diet and weight-loss plan can include all of these.

Although achieving a healthy weight may mean cutting back on some of your favorite foods and changing your eating habits, it's possible to lose weight and still feel satisfied. Remember, this is a lifelong approach, so it needs to be enjoyable.



Mayo Clinic Healthy Weight Pyramid

See the recommended number of servings at upper right. When a range is shown, the lower number of servings is based on 1,200 calories and the higher number is based on 2,000 calories. *Try to use the more healthy fats, such as unsaturated fats.

Tips for healthy eating

Try these tips to help you control what you eat:

- Use a smaller plate to make less food seem like more.
- Keep a bowl of fruit in a handy place so that it's easy to reach for a healthy snack.
- Eat breakfast.
- Replace calorie-laden beverages with water.
- Keep measuring cups and spoons handy to measure out servings until you have learned to estimate them accurately.
- Brush your teeth or chew gum after meals to discourage yourself from snacking.
- Measure out servings rather than eating directly from the package.
- Consider buying yourself a kitchen scale. Some models come preprogrammed with serving size and calorie information for a variety of foods.

Healthy eating involves a diet emphasizing vegetables, fruits and whole grains. These food groups are the foundation of the Mayo Clinic Healthy Weight Pyramid. This approach is healthy and effective because it focuses on nutritious foods that have few calories for their volume. For example, you could eat 20 cups of salad greens to consume the same number of calories in one candy bar or six slices of bacon. So, by choosing to eat more-generous portions of foods found lower on the pyramid, you can consume fewer calories and still feel full.

You need to reduce your calorie intake by about 3,500 calories — that's 500 calories each day — to lose 1 pound in one week. This can also be accomplished by consuming fewer calories and burning more calories through physical activity. One pound may not seem like a lot, but healthy weight loss is slow and steady, at a rate of about 1 to 2 pounds a week. Daily calorie goals under 1,200 for women and 1,400 for men generally aren't recommended, as you may not get enough nutrients. However, some quick start diet plans are healthy if they focus on healthy lifestyle habits that lead to long-term slow and steady weight loss.

Because there are no banned foods in the Healthy Weight Pyramid, you can still include your favorite foods and the occasional indulgence. The idea is to consume smaller portions or eat them less frequently to make sure they fit into your healthy eating plan and daily calorie goals. The number of servings of each food group you should consume is determined by your calorie goals. For the ranges on the pyramid, the lower number in the range is for lower calorie goals and the higher number is for higher calorie goals. In addition, the Healthy Weight Pyramid allows you to eat unlimited amounts of fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, so you'll always have something healthy to eat if you're hungry.

It's important to remember that a serving isn't just how much food you decide to eat, but a specific amount of food defined by standard

Habits to make, to break

If you're overweight, you likely got there by having certain habits. Often, people don't realize how much these behaviors, taken together, help pack on pounds.

If you're ready to lose weight, start by curbing some of these habits. To jump-start your weight loss, try adopting some healthy changes for at least two weeks. If you can stick to it, you're bound to notice results. The pounds will come off, your health will improve, and you'll feel better.

Changes you might try include eating a healthy breakfast, eating more fruits and vegetables on a daily basis and getting more exercise.

Unhealthy habits you might look to change include spending too much time in front of the TV or computer, eating unhealthy snacks and eating too much meat.

measurements. While a serving is a standard amount of food, a portion is the amount you put on your plate. A portion may include two or three servings, which is fine for fruits and vegetables, but may be excessive for fat, carbohydrate or protein. Learning about serving sizes is an important part of your healthy-weight plan. Using visual cues, you'll be surprised how quickly you'll be able to remember and estimate serving sizes.

Armed with your daily calorie goals and a knowledge of serving sizes, you're prepared to turn your unhealthy eating habits into healthy ones. Fortunately, there are a variety of strategies to help you make these changes. Keeping a daily food record has helped many people successfully lose unwanted weight. Designate an appropriate place in the house for eating and avoid distractions. Make a meal schedule and stick to it — whether it's three meals and two snacks a day or six mini-meals, it will give you a better sense of control.

Listen to your body. Eat when you're hungry, and stop when you're full, even if your plate isn't clear. Enlisting the help of friends, family or support groups is also helpful for some people. And remember to enjoy your food. Savoring and taking pleasure in eating will remind you of how enjoyable and satisfying a healthy lifestyle can be.

Beyond the basics

Maintaining a weight program takes dedication. In order to make healthy eating a lifelong endeavor, address the following:

■ *Meal planning and shopping* — Plan your meals around your daily serving goals. Try to include recommended servings from all the food groups throughout the day. Plan and shop by the week so that you have all the ingredients you'll need. If you're off target with your servings one day, make it up the next. Adapt your menus to the seasons to take advantage of fresh, tasty, in-season produce. Shop at farmers markets to find local produce, which tends to be the freshest. Shop from a list and don't go shopping on an empty stomach. Read nutrition labels and have some healthy convenience foods on hand for when you're in a hurry. Emphasize variety in your diet and don't be afraid to try new foods.

■ *Healthy cooking* — Use healthy-cooking methods such as baking, grilling, broiling, steaming and sautéing. Add flavor with herbs, spices and low-fat condiments instead of butter and salt. Use nonstick cookware or vegetable cooking sprays instead of oil or butter. Learn how to adapt recipes to make them more healthy. You can usually replace half of the fat in baked goods with applesauce and reduce the amount of sugar by one-half without affecting texture or taste. Choose lean meat and fish, and try going meatless a few times a week.

■ *Eating out* — Eating out too often can lead to weight gain because you typically don't know how many calories you're consuming. However, eating out can be fun and healthy if you plan ahead. Eat at restaurants that offer healthy options and moderate serving sizes. If you know you'll be consuming more calories when you eat out, increase your physical activity that day. Look for tasty nonmeat options. Save half of your meal for the next day, and limit appetizers, bread, side dishes or high-calorie beverages. Ask for sauces and dressings on the side. Finish the main dish before ordering dessert to see if you're still hungry. Order an appetizer as your main dish or split a meal with a companion.

The flip side: Being underweight

A body mass index lower than 18.5 means that you're probably underweight. Being underweight can have a variety of causes and may or may not carry health risks.

In the United States, eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are common causes of being underweight. But unintentional weight loss can be a sign of an underlying medical condition. These conditions may be physical, for example digestive problems or cancer, or mental, for example forgetting to eat or having depression.

Being underweight also may have to do with your social or financial situation. Perhaps you live alone and don't know how to cook or have lost interest in cooking. If you have a limited income, perhaps you can't afford nutritious food and your medications. In many of these circumstances, being underweight is potentially unhealthy and should be evaluated by a health professional.

If your weight is naturally low despite a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle, your health may not be at risk. However, you still may benefit from regular strength training, especially as you age. Even training with relatively light weights can improve balance and strength, which can help you carry out daily tasks safely.

If you're underweight, talk with your doctor to determine the underlying cause and identify possible solutions.

Physical activity: A rewarding habit

Healthy eating is only one part of a weight management plan. Increasing your daily physical activity and getting a moderate amount of exercise also are key to losing weight, and they also improve your health and well-being. The challenge is to make physical activity a lifelong pursuit — it needs to be as natural and routine as brushing your teeth. In order to do this, you need to create a varied, personalized fitness plan that will become a fun and healthy habit you'll enjoy for a lifetime.

It's easy to find reasons to avoid physical activity — lack of time or motivation, concerns about being hurt, boredom with exercise. However, anyone can become physically active. It's never too late to start, regardless of age, weight, fitness level and health condition. If you've been leading a sedentary life or have health concerns, talk with your doctor to find a safe way to increase your amount of physical activity.

To achieve health benefits from your fitness plan, aim to accumulate at least 30 to 60 minutes of moderately intense physical activity each day. Splitting it up into smaller chunks — for example, taking a 20-minute walk after breakfast and again after dinner — may make it more manageable. If you look at how you currently spend your time, you may find several chunks you could dedicate to physical activity. Schedule fitness into your day as though it's an important appointment.

Remember that losing weight results from a combination of diet and exercise. If you eat 250 fewer calories a day and burn an extra 250 through physical activity, you'll lose 1 pound a week. If you eat 500 fewer and burn 500 more, you'll lose 2 pounds a week.

Exercise is more fun when you enjoy what you're doing, and you're more likely to stick with it. Ask yourself what sort of activities you like and dislike. Do you prefer to exercise alone, or in pairs or groups? Do you enjoy going to a gym, or are you more likely to work out if you have equipment at home? This is your plan, so do what suits you. There's no shortage of activities for you to choose from. Whatever you decide, make sure to include a variety of activities to prevent monotony, and don't be afraid to try something new.

Just as your diet benefits from a variety of foods, your body benefits from different types of physical activity. When developing your fitness plan, try to include the three types of exercise:

- **Aerobic exercise** — Aerobic means "with oxygen." Aerobic exercise increases your breathing and heart rates, helping you use oxygen more efficiently. This improved cardiovascular endurance can help you do chores or climb stairs without becoming short of breath, and you can enjoy your favorite activities longer before getting tired. The advantage of aerobic exercise for weight loss is that the intensity is low enough you can do it for a long time, so you burn a lot of calories. Long-term benefits of regular aerobic exercise can include a reduced heart rate, lower blood pressure, reduced body fat and blood-fat levels, and a lower risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and other conditions.

Aerobic exercise is one of the simplest and safest forms of exercise, especially if you're just starting out. If you've been inactive, increase your activity levels gradually. You'll eventually want to engage in aerobic activity most days of the week for at least 30 minutes — or up to 90 minutes if you're trying to lose weight or maintain a weight loss.

Tips to help you boost your activity level

Use these tips to help boost your activity level:

- Wake up early. Get up 30 minutes earlier than you normally do and use the time to exercise.
- Be active while watching TV. Stretch, walk on the treadmill or ride a stationary bike during your favorite shows. For variety, try increasing your intensity slightly during the commercial breaks.
- Do household chores at a pace that raises your heart rate.
- Walk or bike to work and when you run errands.
- Take a daily walk with your dog or volunteer to walk dogs at a local animal shelter.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- When driving, park a little farther from your destination and walk the rest of the way.
- Start a lunchtime walking group with friends.
- When traveling, stay at a hotel with fitness facilities, or get up early and walk the neighborhood around your hotel.

Something is better than nothing. Even if you can't fit in your scheduled workout, do whatever you have time for instead of skipping it completely. Every little bit counts.

Keep in mind that whether an activity is considered aerobic depends on its intensity level. For example, walking can be aerobic or not, depending on how hard you're working. A simple way to gauge your intensity level is the talk test: While exercising at a moderately intense level, you should be breathing harder, developing a light sweat and feeling some strain on your muscles, but you should still be able to speak in brief sentences. Brisk walking is a great, low-impact aerobic exercise. A variety of activities can be done at an aerobic intensity.

■ *Strength training* — Strength training can help with weight control by improving your overall fitness, allowing you to be more active in general. Training with weights or resistance bands builds stronger muscles, which stabilize and protect your joints and make daily activities easier. Strength training reduces body fat and increases lean muscle mass. This improves your body's capacity to burn calories — even when you're at rest — because muscle burns more calories than does fat.

Strength training is especially important as you get older. It's one of the best activities you can do to counteract the decline in muscle mass that naturally occurs with age. This will help you to carry out daily activities such as moving and lifting more safely. In addition, strength training helps you maintain balance and coordination. This can reduce your risk of falls, which are a major reason individuals need to enter assisted living facilities. Strength training also decreases your risk of osteoporosis and injury and boosts your confidence and self-image.

It's never too late to start strength training. You can benefit from strength training with just two or three sessions a week. Talk with your doctor to develop an appropriate strength training program for your needs. And, consider finding a certified professional or a class at your local community center to learn proper strength training techniques.

■ *Stretching* — Regular stretching can improve your flexibility and reduce stiffness, making daily tasks easier. Other benefits of stretching include improved circulation, better posture, stress relief and relaxation. Like strength training, stretching also enhances your coordination and balance and reduces your risk of injury.

These benefits can be accomplished through five to 10 minutes of gentle stretching after aerobic activities, concentrating on problem areas. When stretching beforehand, first warm up your muscles with a few minutes of walking. Make sure to learn appropriate stretches so that you don't strain your muscles.

A typical weekly schedule combining these three exercise elements might look like this:

- 30 to 60 minutes of aerobic activity most days of the week
- 20 to 30 minutes of strength training two or three days a week
- A few minutes of stretching before and after aerobic activities

Create an exercise routine that works with your schedule. Remember, you can break up your daily exercise into separate segments to make it more manageable. Once you're in the habit of exercising, you may look forward to the break from other obligations. And, like many people, you may realize how pleasant and rewarding it can be.

Maintaining an exercise program is one of the best predictors of long-term weight control. Combined with an active lifestyle, you can't go wrong sticking to an exercise program.

Are you ready?

Before you start a weight-loss program, it's important to examine your motivations.

You're more likely to succeed if losing weight is something you want for yourself and not simply what others expect of you. Don't set yourself up for failure by trying to change your lifestyle if you're distracted by major problems. Think of ways to resolve your concerns, then as soon as you can, reassess your readiness to lose weight.

Helpful resources

Check out these resources for more on weight management:

- *The Mayo Clinic Diet* — This new book is a guide to weight loss composed of three sections to get you started, keep you on track and give you the knowledge and tools to keep those unwanted pounds off for good. It's available in retail bookstores or from the online bookstore at www.Bookstore.MayoClinic.com or by calling toll-free 877-647-6397.

- *Mayo Clinic Wellness Solutions for Weight Loss DVD* — This DVD offers help with losing weight and keeping it off by combining conventional and alternative methods. It's available at the online bookstore at www.Bookstore.MayoClinic.com or by calling toll-free 877-647-6397.

Staying motivated: Finding what works for you

If you want to succeed, you have to be motivated. Motivation underlies your knowledge of healthy eating and proper exercise and is the third building block of healthy living.

Motivation is very personal. Why do you want to lose weight? What is it that will drive you to stay on course in your healthy eating and exercise so that you can reach your goals? Answers to these questions, which form the basis of your motivation, can only come from you.

As you prepare to achieve a healthy weight, consider those questions. Write down your answers, and from them find things that will give you a strong desire to succeed — things you can use for motivation if the going gets tough. Then combine those motivators with your healthy-eating and exercise ideas to form your overall weight management plan.

To develop your plan, set goals for both your diet and physical activity that are realistic, specific and measurable. Track your progress and adjust your goals as necessary. Use your own problem-solving skills to come up with how to handle specific situations such as parties, eating out and traveling, then write those plans down.

Realize that it's normal to experience setbacks and slip into old, unhealthy habits. But while you can expect setbacks, don't let these bumps in the road permanently derail your weight-loss plan. Again, use your problem-solving skills to develop a plan for how to recover and get back on track. And keep those things that motivate you in front of you.

Avoid situations that you know trigger slip-ups until you're more in control of your new behaviors. Ask for support from others so that they can keep you on track when you have difficult days. In addition, be forgiving of yourself. Remember that mistakes happen and that each day is a chance to start fresh.

When planning for success and overcoming setbacks, remember that this is your plan — so do it your way. When starting your program, look at what has worked for you in the past when making large life changes. Are you an all-or-nothing sort of person? If so, implementing a lot of new behaviors at once might work. Or, have you been more successful making changes gradually? In that case, pick one or two specific behaviors to implement each week, such as eating your recommended servings of vegetables or taking a walk every day.

Make a list of obstacles that interfere with your healthy habits. Do you overeat when stressed or bored, or skip your workout because you're too tired at the end of the day? Come up with a list of possible solutions to these challenges. Try one out. If it works, you have a strategy to rely on the next time you face that obstacle. If it doesn't, keep trying solutions until you find one that's successful. There are no right or wrong strategies — only those that work for you.

Don't be discouraged if you have a long way to go to reach your weight goals — remember that even small improvements can be beneficial. This is a long-term approach to healthy living, not a quick fix. It takes commitment, time and regular reinforcement for your new behaviors to become routine habits. But once they do, the benefits to your health and well-being will last a lifetime. □