

Motivation/Accountability

Motivation and accountability are the **MOST** vital ingredients to successful weight loss and healthy living. There are hundreds of books and websites dedicated to weight loss available in the U.S. and yet over 60% of the adult population still struggle with being overweight or obese. Even when people are well educated on proper nutrition and exercise, they often don't sustain their efforts at weight loss. It is usually because they lack the motivation and/or accountability to keep going. For instance, the main reason people on the show "The Biggest Loser" succeed, after years of struggling with weight, is not the food or the exercise but the accountability. They don't want to fail because they know so many people are watching. Here are some tips to help you stay motivated:

- Find a friend, family member, co-worker, etc. that will help you stay on track with your weight loss goals. Commit to touching base at least once a week (preferably 2-3 times a week if possible) by phone, email, or in person to discussing how your attempt at healthier living is going. These types of support services are also available through several weight loss companies like Weight Watchers. This should help you to avoid getting off track and/or giving up. It is important to pick someone who will be supportive but not make excuses for you. It is usually best **NOT** to use your spouse for this.
- Make a list of reasons you want to live a healthier life and lose weight. Some suggestions are things like seeing your kids/grandkids grow up, improving self esteem, or reducing your risk of debilitating diseases like Diabetes, Heart Attacks, Strokes and even cancer (obesity is the second leading cause of death). You can then keep this list and refer to it if and when you feel tempted to stray from your plan. It might also be helpful to put a copy on the front of your fridge as a reminder. Giving a copy of your list to your accountability partner can help him or her support you if you start to lose your motivation.
- Keeping a food journal can really help with accountability. By writing down everything you eat, preferably before or as soon as you eat it, you will likely find that you eat less junk food and less food altogether. A recent study on weight loss showed that people that wrote down everything they ate lost twice as much weight as those that didn't do it. You can use a paper record, do it online or even keep it on a "smart" phone (e.g. "Lose It" is a program for I-phones). It is important not to skip days when you are more likely to indulge, such as Holidays or traveling, because those are the days you need accountability most.
- Find a non-food related way to reward yourself for your hard work. For example, put \$1-5 into a jar every day that you make your calorie and exercise goal. If you don't make your daily calorie goal or skip your exercise session then take out 3-5 times your daily allowance out of the jar as a "punishment". When your jar has \$100 (or whatever amount you set) take it out and spend it on something fun like a massage, new clothes (cause you'll need them as you lose weight), a favorite hobby, going out to the movies, etc. Some people make bets with other people to see how much weight they can lose. This can be lots of fun and a great way to motivate you to stick to it!

Exercise

Without a commitment to regular exercise, the chances of significant, long-term weight loss are virtually impossible. You just cannot starve yourself thin. You have to increase your metabolism and exercise is the best way to do it. Here are some ideas:

If you have not been active at all, then it is very important to start slowly and build gradually. You can start with as little as 5-10 minutes of exercise 3 times a week. This will help you get used to the activity and also set a goal that is very easily reachable. Once you have mastered that level for 3 weeks, then you can increase the time by 5 minutes and/or add an extra day of the week. Your goal should be to get some form of exercise 30 minutes most days of the week. It may take 8-12 months to reach this level but you can do it by making gradual improvement and accomplish incremental “victories” along the way. Because of busy schedules, some people prefer to work out for longer periods 3-4 days per week.

If you are already doing some exercise, then you need to try and increase the amount by about 25% every 3 weeks until you are working out for 30 minutes most days of the week. So for instance if you currently work out for 20 minutes 2 days a week, then increase each work out to 25 minutes or add another day of at least 10 minutes to increase your weekly total to 50 minutes.

You will enjoy your exercise more, and therefore be more likely to do it, if you find activities that are enjoyable. Walking in a scenic place like a park, golf course, the zoo or a mountain trail can make walking much less boring. Take up a hobby like golf, tennis, dancing, biking, swimming, etc. If you have exercise equipment at home set it up in a location that is easy to access and has some type of “distraction” close by such as a TV or stereo to take your mind off the time spent exercising.

Joining a gym can be good as long as it is easy to go and you will ACTUALLY use it. Health clubs usually offer a great variety of work out options which can keep your work out from getting stale. However, if it is out of the way or “always” crowded, you might be better off spending your money on some equipment to use at home. You can often find great deals on used equipment at yard sales or thrift stores.

Most of us could get more exercise in our daily routines if we will just look for ways to do it. For instance, taking the stairs, parking in the back of the parking lot, or walking during your lunch break are all easy options to be more active. Putting on some of your favorite music and dancing is a great way to burn calories (just be sure to close the blinds). Brookstone, a store in the mall, sells a small free standing bicycle pedal set that can easily fit under your desk so that you can pedal away pounds while you’re on the computer or waiting on hold.

For those that are already pretty active, it is important to mix up your work outs. Our bodies learn to improve efficiency as they do the same thing over and over. So if you walk the same track, the same distance at the same speed you will start to burn fewer calories when you do it. It is good to keep your body “guessing” by trying other things like swimming, biking, an aerobics class, lifting weights, etc. If walking is your main form of exercise try walking different areas and change up your speed. You can walk faster/jog during different periods and climb different hills. Most treadmills have different settings to accommodate this. If yours does not, you can try stacking books or bricks under the front legs to create “hills”. Just make sure it is steady.

Healthy Eating

Diet is one of those distasteful “four-letter” words. Most people cringe when they hear it. So we don’t recommend that anyone go on a “diet”, but rather make lifestyle changes. While this may seem like the same thing, a diet usually has a beginning and an end whereas a lifestyle change should hopefully be permanent. You need to become a student of eating properly and consider every meal or trip to the supermarket a chance to increase your knowledge. Try to learn which foods have the best nutrition, are the most satisfying/tasty to you and how each one can fit into a healthy lifestyle.

When shopping for groceries, ALWAYS read the label carefully.

You should focus first on Calories per serving and the serving size. If it is practical, it often helps to calculate the number of calories per item consumed. For instance, if there are 150 calories in a serving of 16 crackers, then each cracker will be about 10 calories. Many foods advertise “low carb” or “low fat” but the calories per serving tells the whole story. Many foods just substitute fat for sugar and sugar for fat. If it tastes too good to be true, it probably is.

Next, look at the saturated fat count. Some fat in our diet is essential and can actually help you fill more full. The unsaturated fats are the best for you. Common sources of these good fats are nuts. You want to minimize saturated fats, as they are the worst for your cholesterol and clogging the arteries.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 16 Crackers (31 g) Servings Per Container About 9	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 150 Calories from Fat 50	
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 6 g	9%
Saturated Fat 1 g	6%
Trans Fat 0 g	
Polyunsaturated Fat 0 g	
Monounsaturated Fat 2 g	
Cholesterol 0 mg	0%
Sodium 270 mg	11%
Total Carbohydrate 21 g	7%
Dietary Fiber 1 g	4%
Sugars 3 g	
Protein 2 g	
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 2%	Iron 6%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65 g 80 g
Sat. Fat	Less than 20 g 25 g
Cholesterol	Less than 300 mg 300 mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400 mg 2,400 mg
Total Carbohydrate	300 g 375 g
Dietary Fiber	25 g 30 g

Next, check out the Carbohydrates. Foods that are high in carbs are usually less filling and they will activate your bodies system for storing fat. That’s one of the reasons that sugared drinks like soda, sweet tea and even fruit juice are so harmful. Drinks sweetened with sugar provide virtually no nutrition to the body and they all tend to cause people to crave even more sweets. You need some carbohydrates (45-60% of total daily calories). You just want the “complex” ones like non-starchy veggies, whole wheat pasta, brown rice, 100% whole wheat bread, fresh fruit and not the “simple” sugars like high fructose corn syrup, starchy veggies (corn, potatoes, etc) and cane sugar.

Last, look at fiber and protein, which are excellent sources of nutrition. They help fill you up and sustain you throughout the day. Protein promotes the build up of muscle and fiber helps to keep your bowels working properly.

Your goal should be to identify foods that offer a good balance of protein, fiber, complex carbohydrates and unsaturated fat without being too high in calories and start filling your pantry and fridge with them. Once you identify good choices you want have to check the labels as much.

A helpful way to find the proper balance in your eating is to set a calorie goal for the day. Generally most people burn about 7 calories per pound of weight per day. More active people will burn more and less active people will likely burn less. So if you weigh 200 lbs then you are burning about 1400 calories per day. To lose weight you have to take in less daily calories, find ways to burn more or preferably do both. In order to lower your calories, it is VERY important for you to pick nutritious foods that fill you up. The body does not like to be “hungry” or feel “starved”. In fact, the body will start to slow down your metabolism if it thinks adequate nutrition is not readily available. So the trick is to find a way to get “full” by eating the right foods.

Foods that are protein rich can really fill you up. It is the main reason people lose weight with the Atkins diet (which we do not routinely recommend). Protein and Carbs have the same number of calories per gram, but the protein does a much better job of helping you stay feeling full.

Chewing a lot sends signals to the brain of a feeling of fullness. Eating veggies that require a lot of chewing and/or chewing sugar free gum can help the body feel more full.

Drinking 8 eight ounce glasses of cold water can also help improve your metabolism and make your stomach feel more full. Dehydration can slow your metabolism by 3%, or about 45 fewer calories burned a day, which in a year could add up to 5 pounds. The key to water isn't how much you drink; it's how frequently you drink it. Small amounts sipped often work better than 8 ounces gulped down at once. Soups (preferably not the creamed ones) can also be useful.

Eating breakfast helps enhance your metabolism at the start of each new day. Your metabolic rate slows overnight after being deprived of food for several hours. Your cells need to be replenished with nutrients or they will adapt to surviving on less by storing fat in anticipation of future deprivation. A study of people that been able to lose weight and keep it off found that one of the top 5 things they had in common was eating breakfast consistently. Even if you're in a hurry, a bowl of high fiber cereal, boiled egg whites or fruit with a protein bar will only take a few minutes.

Avoid sugar. When you eat sugar, you throw your metabolic switch into fat storage mode. High blood sugar levels then lead to increased levels of insulin, our body's signal to store unused energy as fat.

We recommend avoiding ALL sweetened drinks, even diet/zero calorie drinks. A recent study discovered that drinking one or more soft drinks a day — and it didn't matter whether it was diet or regular — led to a 30% greater chance of weight gain around the belly. An article put out by the University of Texas found that aspartame has been linked to obesity. The process of stimulating the brain causes more cravings for sweets and leads to carbohydrate loading.

Restaurant Eating

Even though most people eat better at home than they do at restaurants and fast food places, we all eat out on a regular basis. Whether it is a meal on the road, a meeting with friends/family or just a special occasion, it is a good idea to have a strategy for eating outside the home. Here are some ideas that can help:

- Most restaurants can easily supply a list of the foods they serve and how many calories each one has. If you eat at a place regularly, it would probably be helpful to see this list to help pick some items from the menu that will be the healthiest. You may be surprised to find your favorite salad actually has more calories than a steak or piece of fish and a side of veggies.
- Ordering vegetables (preferably steamed not in casserole form or soaked in butter) instead of fries or other high-calorie sides can be helpful. At fast food places, don't get the combo meals. You will likely do better (and spend about the same) with 2 grilled chicken sandwiches with water than one sandwich, fries and a drink. You can combine your meat onto one bun for even more calorie savings.
- If you order a sandwich, consider eating it without the bread or cutting it in half and putting all the contents between two half slices of bread. You should also leave off the fattening condiments like Mayo, butter, etc. Mustard is usually a great option.
- Share meals or plan to take half the meal home. Restaurant portions have exploded in the last couple decades and are generally 2-4 servings of food. Many items range from 800-2000 calories. That doesn't even count bread, drinks, or dessert.
- Ordering grilled or broiled foods with vegetables on the side is generally a good strategy.
- Have a snack before eating out. Eating an apple or banana with a glass of cold water before a meal can help you feel less hungry when ordering and eating your meal. This can save you money, too.
- Try eating more slowly. Giving yourself time to feel full can cut down on your tendency to overeat. If you've ever had a big meal and then could not believe how full you felt 15 minutes later, then you should know what we're talking about. When you're done eating- Stop! It is common to nibble on bread or uneaten foods while waiting to leave or pay the check.
- If you cannot live without something sweet after your meals, try taking some sugar free gum or a small piece of hard candy with you to feed that craving without having to order a calorie-loaded (and often overpriced!) dessert.

Your healthy future begins now...

So your first step should be to work on your motivation and accountability. Without this step you are just wasting your time and setting yourself up for another failure. Once that is in place, then you need to work on getting active. When that is underway, you can start to integrate some of the tips we give above into your daily dietary routine. Don't let it overwhelm you. Remember you have adopted your current habits over a lifetime so it is going to take more than a few months to radically change your lifestyle. Try to incorporate one of the food recommendations every few weeks until it is second nature. Then you can add another. If you try to do too much too quickly, you may start to feel like you are no longer in control.

It is important to remember that you are NOT on a "diet" you are making adjustments to your everyday lifestyle. You are going to have good days and bad. It is important to learn from mistakes and continue to improve. It is also okay to deviate from the plan occasionally. You are not a robot and it is virtually impossible to follow all the "rules" all the time. The key is to make your indulgences infrequently and focus on doing the right things as much as possible. You also don't want setbacks to cause you to just abandon your efforts. Losing ten pounds and then putting it right back on is actually worse for your health than never losing it in the first place.

Always ask yourself "Why am I eating?" Are you truly hungry or are you bored, stressed, just eating because someone else is, etc.? If the answer is anything but true hunger then you should probably avoid it. Some strategies for avoiding unnecessary eating is to make sure to always sit down to eat, put all food on a plate (which keeps you from grabbing "just one" cookie), or setting a time of day which you will not eat after (such as 9 pm). If you tend to be a stress eater then you need to find other ways to relieve stress like exercise, singing, praying, talking to a friend, etc. If feelings of stress or anxiety are severe, medication may also be necessary.

Pick the "low hanging" fruit first. Try to identify the most obvious ways to improve and make those changes first. This can provide some substantial success and only impact your current lifestyle a little bit. For example, if you have a 20-oz bottle of Coca-Cola (or other sugared drink) every day, switch to water or unsweetened tea. You should lose about 20-25 lb in a year.

Remember that the pain of regret is always worse than the pain of discipline. You won't regret the work it takes to get to the mountaintop once you see the awe inspiring views and breathe in the fresh, clean air.