

Weight Control Strategies

Common Sense Solutions for the Battle of the Bulge
Client: Rexall.com

You know the drill: Eat less, exercise more and control your weight. Nothing too difficult about that, right? Then why are so many of us — one in every three Americans — losing the weight control battle? One reason may well be that we haven't developed appropriate weight control strategies.

Strategy No. 1

It's Your Life

Being overweight — a little or a lot — is often thought of as a temporary problem that only needs to be treated until you lose that extra weight. That's where the real problem begins, because weight control should be considered a life-long effort. It's not about crash diets or fad diets or excessive exercising whenever your favorite jeans get too tight. Your first strategy for weight control should be to adopt a long-term approach to good health. Forget about trying to reach the lowest number on the "ideal weight" chart. Good health — not your bathroom scale — should be a weight control priority.

Strategy No. 2

Pay Attention When You Eat

It's true that healthy foods make you healthy. But what about the amount of food you eat? If you're noshing on "good" food, do you need to be concerned about how much you're eating? Yes. You gain weight when you give your body more calories than it burns. Even "healthy" foods can lead to weight gain if the portions are beyond what your body needs. Does this mean you're doomed to a life of weighing and measuring every bite you eat? Of course not. Just don't let your hunger get out of control.

When you're extremely hungry you're more likely to eat rapidly — and that means you really don't notice when you've had enough. The result? You overeat. Eat regular meals and pay attention! Concentrate on enjoying your food. Put aside all other activities when you're eating and simply eat! Don't watch TV, work at your computer, read the paper or drive. And don't eat right out of a package — you'll end up absentmindedly eating more than you intended to. Instead, put your food on a plate or napkin so you can see how much you're eating. If you think you might be eating larger portions than you need, make a conscious decision to take a smaller serving. After you've eaten that serving, wait at least five minutes before deciding if you want more to eat. Those five minutes will give your brain time to get the message from your stomach that you're full.

Strategy No. 3

"Because It's Good for You!"

A healthful eating plan should include a variety of food choices. Choose from the Food Guide Pyramid and include the suggested number of servings from each food group:

- 6 to 11 servings of bread, cereal, rice or pasta
- 3 to 5 servings of vegetables
- 2 to 4 servings of fruits
- 2 to 3 servings of milk, yogurt or cheese
- 2 to 3 servings of lean meat, poultry, fish, or meat alternatives such as dried beans, eggs, peanut butter or nuts

Using the Food Guide is a good strategy, primarily because it ensures you're eating healthfully. It also allows you to feel full and satisfied while you control your weight.

Strategy No. 4

Mind Control

Behavioral strategies can help you control your weight. Keep track of how much you eat each day, either mentally recording your food consumption or actually writing down what you eat and reviewing the results at the end of the day. Remind yourself that eating more than you need is wasting food. Examine your reasons for eating what you did. Is it possible you eat for reasons other than hunger? Food is often used for comfort or as a reward. Don't fall into that trap. Think of other ways to satisfy your non-hunger urges. Get a massage, for example, or treat yourself to a movie (without the buttered popcorn!). If you eat when you're stressed, try stress management techniques, like yoga or aromatherapy.

Strategy No. 5

Get Off the Couch

It may not be easy to give up that sedentary lifestyle but there's no getting around it— people who are physically active are more successful at losing and keeping off extra pounds. Most experts recommend a combined total of 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days. If you've been King (or Queen) of the Couch Potatoes, build up the time by gradually increasing physical activity each day. It doesn't matter what type of physical activity you choose. In fact, "moderate physical activity" includes some things you might already be doing, such as gardening and housework. For some of us, this type of "regular" activity is easier to incorporate into our lives, which also makes it easier for us to become more active. Just take advantage of any chance to get up and move around:

- Take a walk around the block.
- Rake leaves.
- Wash the car.
- Walk up the stairs instead of taking the elevator.
- Mow the lawn.
- Chase the dog.
- Park your car farther away from your destination and walk the extra distance.

Make the most of everyday opportunities to be active. And when you're ready for a more scheduled routine, try daily aerobic activities. Aerobic exercise is "any extended activity that makes you breathe hard while using the large muscle groups at a regular, even pace." Aerobic activities also burn more calories than other form of exercise. Because aerobics get your heart muscle pumping, be sure to consult your physician before beginning your exercise program. Once you have that OK, however, try any of the following:

- Bicycling
- Swimming
- Jogging
- Aerobic dancing
- Using aerobic equipment, such as a treadmill or stationary bike
- Racquetball
- Rowing
- Ice or roller skating
- Cross-country or downhill skiing