

Life's Simple 7: Maintain a Healthy Weight

Hi, I'm Rachael. I'm here to talk with you about getting to a healthy weight.

If you're overweight, don't waste your energy feeling guilty or bad about it. Instead, invest your energy in moving forward. Any step you take to get healthy is a step in the right direction. Even taking off a few pounds can add a lot to improve your health.

I used to be pretty athletic in high school and college, so I never really paid much attention to what I ate. But by my early 30s, I had slowed down my life without slowing down my eating habits. And I was carrying around an extra 25 pounds. It happened so gradually that I didn't really notice it.

My sister was working on losing some weight and she asked me if I knew my body mass index, or BMI. I didn't even know what that was but she showed me how to calculate it. And I realized my BMI was putting me in a dangerous category. It was a wakeup call for me to address this issue. Besides, I really wanted to enjoy good health.

So I decided it was high time I got moving again. Data from a recent study found that over one-third of American adults are obese and a significant percentage of the remaining two-thirds are overweight. And our country's childhood obesity rates are very concerning. Too much fat, especially around your waist, raises your risk for high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and diabetes. Your BMI is a height to weight comparison that helps you identify the healthy weight target for your height. For most people, it's a good indicator of body fat. You can read about the math formula if you'd like but most people prefer to just enter their height and weight numbers into a BMI calculator. If your BMI is higher than 25, you need to bring that number down.

Losing weight means changing the balance of calories in to calories out. If we eat more calories than we need, we gain weight. If we eat fewer calories than we use, we lose weight. So start with good information. You need to know how many calories you should eat each day for your individual level of activity. And then you'll need to find ways to stay within your limits.

You might even keep a food journal at first to notice how much you're eating, and whether you're eating out of habit instead of real hunger. When you're aware of your road blocks, you can plan alternative choices. A couple of days of tracking your calories can help you figure out how to dodge the food traps.

If I got tired and hungry, I would end up stopping for fast food or snacking on junk. Planning healthy meals helped me break that habit. I know it's been great for my kids too. We're all practicing better choices together.

So decide ahead of time how you will deal with your habits and temptations to veer off course. When you're offered a slab of chocolate cake, you can politely and firmly turn it down. Or you might keep some apple slices on hand, and opt for those instead.

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And educate yourself. Read up on healthy food preparation, like steaming your veggies and avoiding extra fats. Read food labels and avoid foods that are high in sugar, saturated fats, trans fats and calories.

I started out by packing my kiddos into the jogging stroller and just walking 4 times a week. Nothing too athletic like my old days, but it was a great start. Regular physical activity even 30 minutes a day has so many proven benefits. Besides helping you lose weight, it also helps reduce your abdominal fat and preserve muscles during weight loss. The amount any individual person needs for weight loss can vary. But a good plan includes 30 to 45 minutes of moderate physical activity, like brisk walking, done nearly every day. Find something that you like to do and find ways to enjoy it, like taking a stroll or a jog with a friend or your dog.

Remember to focus on your goal: feeling your best and living a healthy life. In the long run, you'll be so glad you invested in your health. I'm planning for many years of living well, and I hope you'll join me in taking the simple 7 to heart.