



Maintaining change



Health



Wellness



Nutrition



Support

Introduction

There is lots of support to help us make changes, but how can we make sure we are able to stick to them long term. Almost any diet plan or exercise routine can make us fitter and healthier, but the ones that are most successful are the ones that we can maintain with little effort. When this occurs, any changes made have become a part of your lifestyle and your health will continue to improve.

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Don't focus on the scales

When to weigh yourself is a personal choice. You may find it helpful to weigh yourself once or twice a week, but once a month is more likely to give an accurate idea of progress.

Weighing yourself daily isn't recommended as this doesn't give an accurate measure of progress, and day-to-day fluctuations in weight are normal. An increase on the scales does not always equate to an increase in body fat. Actual weight gain or loss is a process that happens over time, not overnight.

When weighing yourself, make sure to do so at the same time of day each time. Use the same weighing scale and wear minimal clothing to ensure that an accurate measurement is taken.

After a few months of success, weight loss starts to slow down. So, if you only focus on the numbers, you can start to lose track of what is important in relation to health. Remember: all our body shapes are different and there is no perfect number to achieve.

Alternatively, you don't need to weigh yourself at all. Thinking about how energetic you feel, how well your clothes fit, or using different measurements like waist circumference or body fat percentage will give you a measure of progress even when the number on the scales doesn't change much.

Body composition machines at our Be Well leisure centres measure your body fat, visceral fat (the fat around your organs), muscle mass and bone density amongst other things.

Some people like to take regular progress photos so they can see differences in their body, and these can be a great way to keep you motivated and show how far you've come.

Be kind to yourself

It's important to remember that diet changes and weight loss are not a quick fix. You need to make changes to your lifestyle that you can afford and stick to, helping to prevent the cycle of gaining and losing weight.

How to achieve this will be different for everyone and will often take practice. It's important to be patient and kind to yourself as you figure out what it takes to live a healthy lifestyle and become the healthiest and happiest version of you.

Make sure you enjoy the changes you make by choosing foods and physical activities that you enjoy. Every choice should work for you and the people around you. There is no magic method, despite what certain marketing tactics may want you to believe.

Once you've found your happy place, you will find it sustainable. Remember, the best new healthy diet for you is the one that you can stick long-term.

Stay consistent

It's important that you establish daily habits and patterns that set you up for success. Some examples include:

- a walk before, during or after work
- drinking a glass of water with each meal
- eating breakfast daily
- limiting buying pre-packaged food for lunches

A particular habit that often leads to weight regain is eating nutritious foods on weekdays and eating less nutritious foods at the weekend.

While there isn't anything wrong with a takeaway as part of a balanced diet, this mentality often leads us to binge on junk food. Instead, you should aim for consistency across all seven days of the week, while allowing yourself the occasional treat. Following a consistent eating pattern throughout the week is more likely to sustain weight loss long-term.

Be prepared to make mistakes

Not every change you make will provide the results you expect. You may find you have stopped progressing or even gone backwards. This is a normal part of progress. Along any journey to a goal there will be obstacles and challenges. Do not panic, revisit your goal, remind yourself why you started and continue to change and adapt. Be kind to yourself.

Find a support system

A support system can hold you accountable for your healthy lifestyle and be there to celebrate the successes, but also support you through the challenges. Support can come in many forms...

A workout buddy: It's often easier to stay committed when you feel you would be letting the other person down if you didn't. Group exercise is great for this as you can meet new people who can look out for you.

A community group: This could be a Be Well running group, a local food community or craft club, a structured programme where you have like-minded people to talk to.

An online community: There are lots of groups offering support and helping you to connect with people looking to achieve the same goal. You don't always have to communicate with anyone (sometimes simply reading tips people post can be useful). Finding the right group on social media in which people are supportive and share useful tips is helpful.

Friends and family: Involve them in your goal setting and ask them to support you. This could be helping with the cooking of healthier meals or being your workout buddy.

Don't cut out your favourite foods

To make things sustainable, your enjoyment of healthier foods should be balanced with the joy you get from your favourite foods and treats. If most of the food you eat in a week is nutritious, there's nothing wrong with eating less nutritious foods now and then - either at home, or at social occasions and meals out.

Don't judge food as 'good' or 'bad', this only increases feelings of guilt afterwards. A few treats will make little difference in the long-term, as long as you balance them over a sustained period of time.

Control stress

Stress is one of the biggest factors that can cause disruption to our routine. High stress levels increase cortisol in our blood stream. This is essential in certain scenarios, such as when exercising, but harmful over long periods of time.

While stress can come from many places, our body does not know this and responds in a way that preserves our body fat and energy stores as a response to believing it is under threat.

Consistently high levels of cortisol are linked with increased food intake, cravings, low energy, lack of sleep and poor mood, which can negatively affect your ability to stick to a healthy lifestyle. Stress is also a common trigger for impulsive eating, which is when you eat even when you are not hungry.

There are many things you can do to combat stress, such as doing something you enjoy. This could be going for a walk, reading a book, yoga, meditation, or even sleeping! You can find more help for managing stress on the Wigan Council website: www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Health-Social-Care/Adults/fit-and-well/Mental-health/Improving-mental-wellbeing.aspx

Be active

Staying active is the best way to maintain weight loss. People who remain active during their weight loss journey and after they achieve their target weight are more successful at keeping the weight off.

Aim for 30 minutes per day of physical activity that makes you feel slightly out of breath. All movement counts, but try to do resistance and balance training as well as cardiovascular activities.

Prioritise sleep and rest

Sleep deprivation is associated with weight gain for many different reasons. When you are not sleeping enough, your body doesn't function as well as it usually would, which can cause you to crave unhealthy foods. This is partly because poor sleep leads to higher levels of ghrelin, which is known as the 'hunger hormone' because it increases appetite.

As a general guide, aim for around eight hours of uninterrupted sleep each night to ensure you are functioning at your best. If this seems difficult now, weight loss and being active will support you to achieve this in the longer term.

Be prepared for setbacks

Setbacks are inevitable when it comes to weight loss and weight maintenance. There may be times when you give in to a craving or skip a workout. However, the occasional setback does not mean that you should throw your goals out of the window. Simply move on to the next day and continue working towards your goal.

Do not be discouraged if it takes longer than you expect to adapt, just do your best to stay motivated and focused while adapting to a new healthy diet and regime. Eating healthily and being active regularly will become second nature eventually. For more advice, check out our booklet on 'Overcoming setbacks'.

Final thought

For any change to be successful and lasting, it needs to be something you enjoy and find easy to do. If this is the case then you will find healthy eating and regular physical activity become a part of your lifestyle and you do not need to think too much about it.

If you would like to learn more or require more information and support, please get in touch!

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