

Weight Loss Diets

What is a healthy weight loss diet?

A good weight loss diet should include a variety of healthy and satisfying foods as well as fewer calories. What works best is to slowly change the way you eat, and how much you exercise. The best diets help you lose weight slowly but steadily, so you can keep a healthy weight after you have reached your goal. Develop new habits that will last a lifetime instead of trying to lose pounds now and gain them back in a few months. In general, a healthy eating plan for weight loss is one that includes:

- A lot of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans
- Fat-free or low-fat milk products
- Lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs or egg whites, nuts, seeds, and soy foods
- Limited amounts of saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars

Keep track of everything you eat in a food diary. As soon as you eat or drink, write it down in a small pocket diary, or track it using an app for your smartphone or computer. Seeing what you eat and drink will help you learn more about your eating patterns and food habits.

What are calories?

A calorie is a way to measure the energy value of food. Your body burns calories for energy. Proteins, carbohydrates, and fats all have calories. To lose weight, eat fewer calories without giving up nutrition and burn more calories with more physical activity. If you take in fewer calories, your body will burn fat stored in your body to get the energy it needs and you will lose weight.

You can lose 1 pound a week by eating 500 fewer calories a day than you need to keep your present weight. Try to lose 1 to 2 pounds a week. If you lose more than that each week, you begin to lose muscle rather than fat.

Most weight loss diets suggest 1200 to 1500 calories a day for women and 1500 to 1800 calories a day for men. However, calorie needs can vary a lot. They depend on your activity level and current weight. Ask your healthcare provider how many calories you need each day.

Don't reduce your calories too much. If you get too few calories a day, your body will slow down your metabolism. This can happen if you go on a "starvation diet." The body's survival response will then stop you from losing weight.

What foods should I limit or avoid?

Try to avoid foods with:

- Refined grain products such as white rice and white flour. Eat whole grains instead.

- Refined carbohydrates (sugar) and foods with added sugars such as sucrose, glucose, dextrose, high-fructose corn syrup, corn sweetener, honey, and brown sugar
- Saturated fats such as butter, cream cheese, poultry skin, whole-milk dairy products including cheese, and high-fat meats
- Other foods that often contain a lot of fat and trans fats, such as pastries, cakes, cookies, potato chips, and crackers
- Fried foods
- Lunch meats that are high in fat, salt, and preservatives. Look for low-fat, low-salt versions.

Alcohol is high in calories and low in nutrients. If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Moderate drinking means up to 1 drink a day for women and up to 2 drinks for men. A drink equals 12 ounces of regular beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1 and 1/2 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.

What about popular diets?

There are many popular diets. Some are unsafe for the long term. Others are healthy and may be right for you. Remember that no one diet works for everyone. Here are some of the more popular diets:

- **High-protein, low-carbohydrate diets** result in a quick loss of weight right away. Most of these diets allow unlimited amounts of high-protein foods and limit other food groups. Carbohydrate content varies but usually is very low at first. Two examples of this type of diet are the Atkins Diet and the South Beach Diet. The amount of fat allowed in the diets can vary. It is best to eat low amounts of saturated fat and add other food groups back into your diet over time.

The long-term benefits and risks of high-protein, low-carb diets are not yet known. A possible risk is that this diet limits foods such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables that help lower your risk for cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and other health problems. It is not clear if these diets are better than a low-calorie, low-fat diet for maintaining weight loss.

- **Balanced nutrition diet plans** are higher carbohydrate, low saturated-fat diets that more closely follow the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and guidelines from the American Heart Association and Cancer Society. Examples of this type of diet are the Mayo Clinic Healthy Weight Pyramid, American Heart Association, and Mediterranean diets.

ChooseMyPlate was developed by the USDA. It is a simple way to manage how much you eat of each food group at each meal. ChooseMyPlate helps you make healthy food choices in the right amounts. To follow this plan, take a 9-inch plate. Fill half of the plate with fruits and vegetables. Use one quarter of the plate for starchy foods like whole-wheat bread, brown rice, or potatoes, and one quarter of the plate for protein foods like meat or beans. If you use this plate as your guide for each meal, it is easy to get the right amount of each food group each day. You can add a cup of low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt on the side. Using this plate as a guideline for getting the right amount

of each food group every day helps you eat healthy. It also helps you manage your servings so you can control your weight.

- **Commercial diet plans and weight loss clinics** offer support and motivation, a variety of foods, and meal plans of 500 to 1500 calories a day. Some have pre-packaged foods. Others count calories. Ask your healthcare provider which plan might work best for you. Some programs, such as Weight Watchers, can help you change bad eating habits and stick to your weight loss diet.

Each year there are more and more diet books, each promising great results. Some diets are very low calorie (less than 500 calories a day) or include fasting. It is hard to tell which diets are based on good science and which are dangerous. Some diets limit you to a few specific foods. Examples of these diets are the grapefruit diet and the cabbage diet. These diets do not count calories, but you need a lot of willpower to follow a diet with so little variety. As a general rule, the only reason these diets work is because you are eating fewer calories. Results have nothing to do with the type of food you are eating. You can't stay healthy if you follow these diets for too long. You may start having symptoms caused by a lack of some vitamins and minerals after just a few days on one of these diets. Ask your healthcare provider for advice.

Avoid any diet that promises weight loss of more than 2 pounds per week, cuts out entire food groups, or does not suggest that you also exercise for health and weight loss.

How will exercise help me lose weight?

Exercise offers many health benefits. Regular physical activity lowers your pulse, blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar. It also increases your energy level and improves your sleep. Exercise also improves your chances of losing weight and staying at a healthy weight. The more active you are, the more calories you burn.

A healthy goal is to exercise for 2 hours and 30 minutes or more each week, in addition to your regular activities. You don't need to do 30 minutes of activity all at once. You can do shorter periods, at least 10 minutes each time. Aim for a moderate level of effort that lets you talk while moving, but without getting out of breath.

Do something you enjoy. If you choose something you don't really like, you won't stick with it. Walking for 15 to 30 minutes, 3 to 6 times a week, can be a good start. Other choices are dancing, riding a bike, playing sports, or taking an exercise class. To avoid getting burned out, do a variety of activities. Include some strength training, some aerobic exercise, and some stretching. Strength training will make your muscles stronger and able to work longer without getting tired. Muscle mass burns more calories than fat so as your muscle increases, so does your ability to burn calories.

Be sure to check with your healthcare provider before you start an exercise program.

You can learn more about healthy eating from

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
<http://www.eatright.org/Media/content.aspx?id=264&terms=diet+reviews>
- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans
<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/dietaryguidelines.htm>
- USDA ChooseMyPlate.gov
<http://www.choosemyplate.gov>

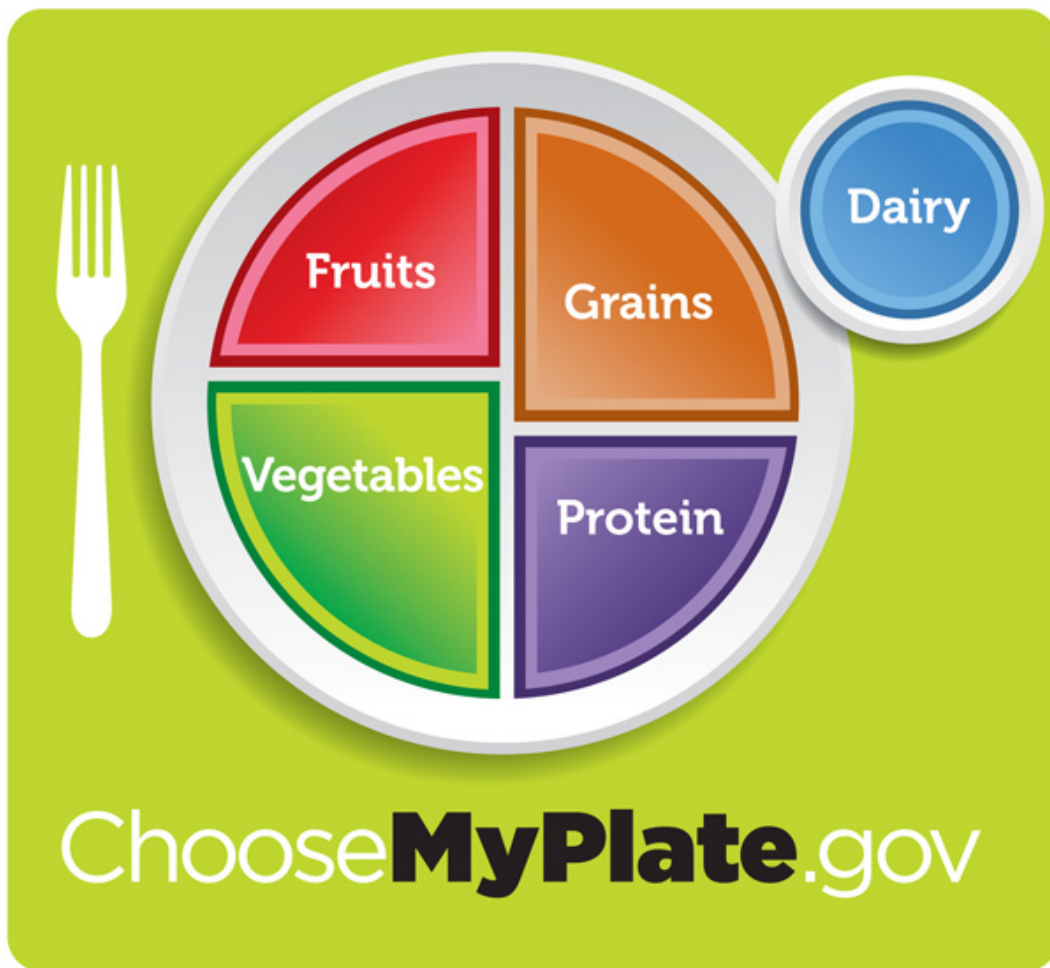
If you compulsively overeat, Overeaters Anonymous may help. The program is free.

- Overeaters Anonymous
505-891-2664
<http://www.oa.org>

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My Plate



From the US Department of Agriculture