



Committing to Change

Losing weight takes more than desire. It takes commitment and a well-thought-out plan. Here's a step-by-step guide to getting started.

Step 1: Make a commitment.

Making the decision to lose weight, change your lifestyle, and become healthier is a big step to take. Start by making a commitment to yourself.

Write and sign a contract that includes:

- The amount of weight you want to lose
- The date you'd like to lose the weight by
- Changes you'll make to have healthy eating habits
- Your plan for getting regular physical activity

Also, write down why you want to lose weight and put the list where it will serve as a daily reminder.



Step 2: Take stock of where you are.

Consider talking to your health care provider. They can check your height, weight, and any weight-related risk factors you may have. Get a followup appointment to monitor changes in your weight or any health conditions.

1 Keep a “food diary” for a few days. Write down everything you eat. You’ll become more aware of what you eat, which can help you avoid mindless eating.

2 Next, examine your lifestyle. What might pose challenges to your weight loss efforts? For example, does your work or family obligations make getting enough physical activity difficult? Do you find yourself eating sugary or fatty foods because that’s what you have for your kids? Do you pick up fast food because you’re rushing? Think through things you can do to help overcome these challenges.

3 Finally, what can you change in your day-to-day routine to help you lose weight? For example, can you and some coworkers or neighbors take a walk at lunchtime? Is there a place in your community, such as a recreation center, where you could exercise? Could you sometimes walk instead of driving your car or taking the bus?



Committing to Change (continued)

Step 3: Set realistic goals.

Set short-term goals and reward yourself along the way. If your long-term goal is to lose 40 pounds and control your blood pressure, short-term goals might be to every day eat a healthy breakfast, take a 15-minute walk, or have a salad or vegetable with dinner.

Focus on two or three goals at a time.

Effective goals are:

- Specific
- Realistic
- Forgiving (less than perfect)

For example, “exercise more” isn’t a specific goal. But “I’ll walk 15 minutes, 3 days a week for the first week,” is specific and realistic.

Small changes every day can lead to big results. Also, realistic goals are achievable goals. By achieving your short-term goals day-by-day, you’ll feel good about your progress and be motivated to continue. Setting unrealistic goals, such as losing 20 pounds in 2 weeks, can leave you feeling defeated and frustrated.

Expect occasional setbacks. They happen when you get away from your plan for whatever reason—maybe the holidays, longer work hours, or a life change. When setbacks happen, get back on track as quickly as possible. Also consider what you would do differently to prevent setbacks if a similar situation happens in the future.

Everyone is different—just because your neighbor lost weight by taking up running, doesn’t mean that’s the best option for you. Try a variety of activities, such as walking,

dancing for a set time in your living room, or group exercise classes, to see what you enjoy and can fit into your life. These activities will be easier to stick with over the long term.

Step 4: Get information and support.

Find family members or friends who will support your efforts. Making lifestyle changes is easier when you have others to talk to and rely on for support. Do you have coworkers, members of your religious institution, or neighbors with similar goals? You can share healthful recipes and go for walks together.

Joining a weight loss group or talking to your health care provider can help.

Step 5: Monitor your progress.

Revisit the goals you set for yourself (in Step 3) and regularly evaluate your progress. If you set a goal to walk each morning but are having trouble fitting it in before work, see if you can walk at lunchtime or after work. Evaluate which parts of your plan are working well and which ones need tweaking. Then rewrite your goals and plan accordingly.

If you’re consistently achieving a goal, tweak it or add a new one or so you continue improving.

Reward yourself for your successes!

Recognize when you’re meeting your goals and be proud of your progress. Use non-food rewards, such as a bouquet of flowers, an outing with friends, or a relaxing bath. Rewards help keep you motivated.