

From the **WebMD** Archives

How to Keep Weight off Forever

You've hit that magic number at last; now what do you do? The goal is to lose the extra weight and never find it again. Unfortunately, only about a third of dieters are successful at maintaining their loss. Seasoned dieters know that keeping it off takes vigilance, and for some folks, that's more difficult than the actual weight loss.

Maintaining weight loss requires continued modification of your lifestyle. If you go back to the habits that caused you to be overweight in the first place, weight gain is inevitable. Permanent weight loss calls for healthy eating and exercise routines, just like the ones you developed while you lost the weight. Many people relax their vigilance too much after they lose weight, then gain it right back. You can relax a little once you've reached your goal -- but only a little.

Practice Makes Perfect

The more you practice something, the easier it becomes. It takes time to etch those healthy habits into a routine. Be patient with yourself, and don't let all your hard work go down the tubes. Know your weaknesses and be prepared. You will be tempted by certain foods and in certain situations, but if you keep your resolve strong, you can overcome temptations. Moderation is a great approach in those tough situations. One of my favorite strategies for weight maintenance is to assign a day of the week when I let myself indulge -- a little. This day cannot change from week to week; otherwise, you could find yourself with more than one day "off" every week due to circumstances. On that designated day off -- mine is Saturday for obvious reasons -- I give myself permission to indulge in my favorite foods, within reason. A small piece of cheesecake is fine, but not the whole cake! It's basically controlled cheating. Works like a charm for me, and it may work for you, too. Just knowing that I can loosen up on Saturday helps me stay on top of my game all week.

Successful Losers

We can take a page from people who've succeeded at the weight-loss game. The National Weight Control Registry (NWCR) tracks people who've lost at least 60 pounds and kept it off for a minimum of five years.

Here are some of the things they do:

Write it down. Journaling your food intake is a powerful tool to keep you on track.

Eat light and right. Most successful losers follow low-fat diets -- no gimmicks, special diet foods, or magic pills -- because they simply don't work for the long term.

Exercise daily. Walking is the preferred activity, and these folks build it into their day, making it a must-do just like brushing their teeth. NWCR members engage in about an hour of exercise per day.

Start the day with breakfast. All the research supports the role of starting your day the healthy way.

Weigh in regularly. If they gain a few pounds, they immediately make adjustments to get back to their healthy weight.

According to the NWCR's James O. Hill, PhD, the longer people keep the weight off, the easier it becomes to maintain the loss. Successful losers find pleasure in their new lifestyles and it no longer feels like a chore to live a healthy life. It needs to be a way of life, not a diet. And weight maintenance does get easier over time. If you can hit the two-year mark, chances are, you're golden.

Stay the Course

Keep your motivation high and don't let setbacks get you off track: If you fall off the wagon, just brush yourself off and return to your winning ways. If you can learn to think like a thin person and act accordingly, you'll stay thin forever. And the more you practice, the easier it becomes. By the time you get to the maintenance level, chances are you have identified patterns, techniques, and skills that have proved to be helpful in keeping you on track.

Reward yourself. You should be commended for making healthy changes in your diet and exercise routines that not only serve as an inspiration to your friends and family but also have tremendous health benefits

Research has shown that keeping in contact with the people or programs (like WebMD's Weight Loss Clinic) that helped you lose the weight is linked to long-term weight maintenance. It makes sense to stay connected with the people who helped you succeed in the first place. So stick around and let us help you maintain your weight loss!