

You've just lost weight and you don't want to see that number go back up on your scale. Although gaining the weight back might feel inevitable, it doesn't have to be. In fact a recent analysis by the National Weight Control Registry found long-term weight maintenance is possible — if you follow these key behaviors. Below, follow these tricks from dietitians and successful dieters who were able to lose and weight and keep it off.

Build more lean muscle. Maintain, or even increase, your metabolism by continuing to build lean muscle. "Muscle has a higher metabolism than fat does," explains Emily Baner, RD, clinical dietitian at Houston Northwest Medical Center. If you don't yet train with weights, add this type of exercise to your overall program now. If you do, increase the amount of weight you're working with to keep yourself challenged.

Fight off hunger with more filling foods. A three-year University of Pittsburgh study of 284 women between the ages of 25 and 45 found that those who avoided weight gain the best were the ones whose meals kept them feeling full. "Keeping that feeling of fullness can be done with foods high in fiber — think fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein," says Jenna Anding, PhD, RD, of the department of nutrition and food science at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas.

Avoid temptation. The University of Pittsburgh study also found that women who best controlled their weight were good at resisting the temptation to binge on forbidden treats. This doesn't mean never indulging in a gooey dessert again, but rather picking — and limiting — your moments. There are many ways to avoid daily temptations, including planning ahead when eating out, eating out less, and banning your worst weaknesses from the house.

Count calories. Another hallmark of successful weight maintenance, according to the University of Pittsburgh study, is regularly counting calories. Use a journal such as My Calorie Counter to keep a running total throughout the day if that helps you keep track of calorie consumption. In the weight-control survey, the women who were most successful at less than 1,800 calories a day and limited fat intake.

Plan your meals in advance. A maintenance diet has a lot of the same components as a weight-loss diet. Having a meal-by-meal plan that you can stick to, although it has more calories than your diet plan did, can act as a guide to keep you on track.

Consider adding minutes to your exercise plan. Experts recommend at least 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week, but emphasize that the more you exercise, the better able you are to maintain a weight loss. Participants in the weight control

survey walked for at least 60 minutes daily — or burned the same calories with other activities — so aim for 60 to 90 minutes of physical activity every day.

Measure your portions. According to a Center for Disease Control (CDC) study of more than 4,000 U.S. adults, the biggest factors in success were measuring portions and fats, the most caloric foods, in particular. This doesn't mean you have to carry a food scale everywhere you go, but using it as often as possible at home will teach you how to eyeball portion sizes at restaurants and immediately know how much to eat, and how much to take home in a doggie bag.

Weigh yourself daily. The same CDC study reported that people who weigh themselves once a day are twice as successful at keeping off lost weight as those who don't step on the scale as often. Daily weigh-ins, which can be discouraging when you're on a diet, can be a boon during maintenance; they let you see, and stop, any slow creep upward as soon as it happens.

Include dairy in your diet. According to a study of 338 adults, those who ate three or more servings of low-fat dairy daily were more likely to keep off the weight than those who ate one serving or less. For women in particular, this has the additional benefit of improving bone health.

Let your plate be your guide. When you can't count calories or measure portions accurately, Banes recommends using the "plate method" as a way to control the amount you're eating. A great tip for dieters, it works just as well for people on a maintenance plan. Simply put, when you serve yourself using this method, at least half your plate should be vegetables and the remaining space should be divided evenly between lean protein and whole grains. If you go back for seconds, limit yourself to vegetables, fruit or low-fat dairy.

Watch less TV. In the National Weight Control Registry Survey, dieters who watched fewer than 10 hours of TV a week were more successful in maintaining weight loss than those who spent more time vegging out in front of the tube. And less TV time might have other benefits, too — an analysis from the Harvard School of Public Health found that too much TV can raise your risk for heart disease, diabetes, and death.

Eat breakfast. They call it the most important meal of the day for a reason. In the survey, women who regularly ate breakfast were more successful with long-term weight loss than those who skipped the first meal of the day. It's best to eat similar healthy choices regularly (think oatmeal, Greek yogurt, and fresh fruit) and always start out with a good breakfast to avoid splurging or overeating on special occasions.