

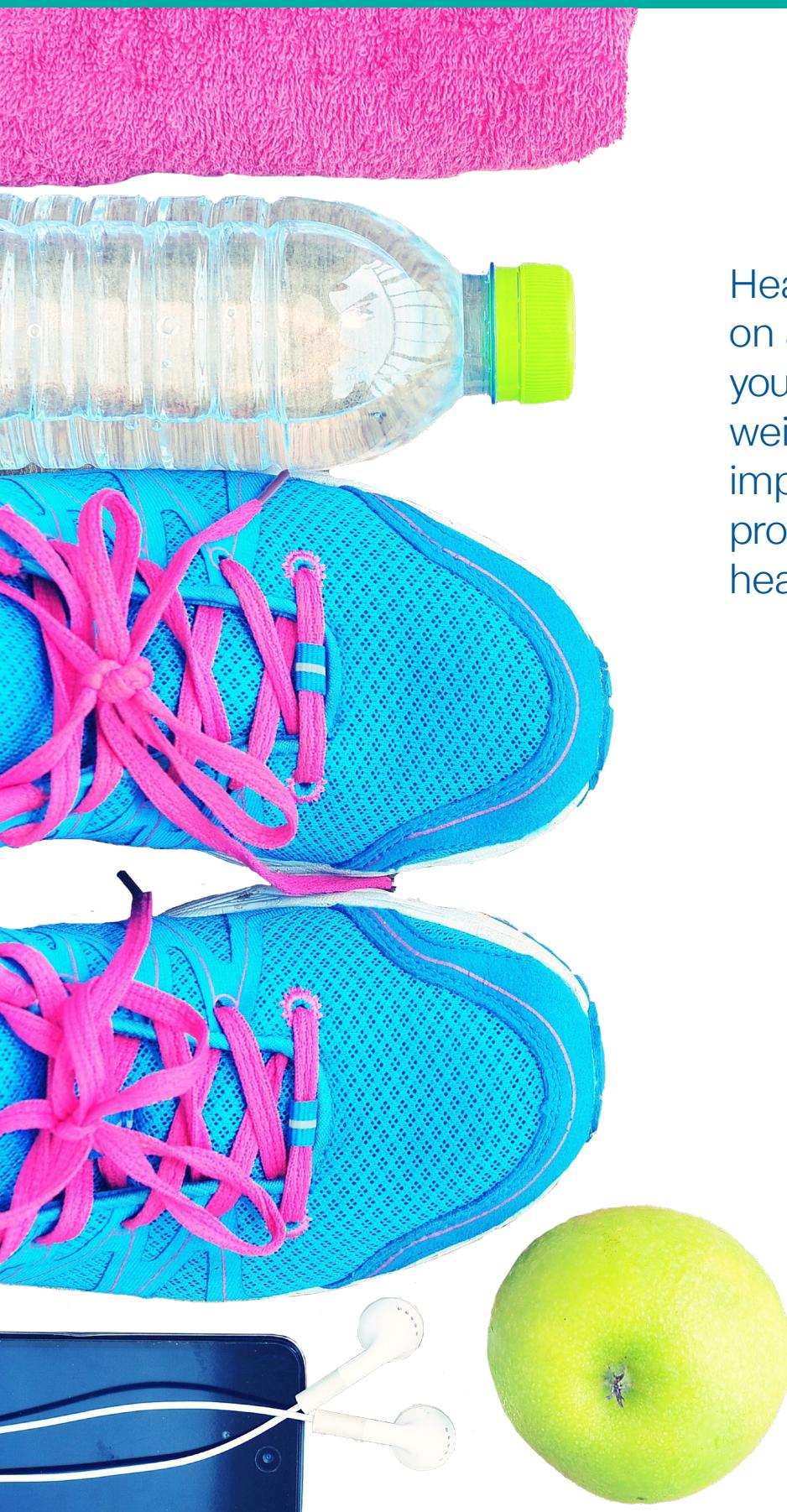


Healthy living guidebook

Resources for Living®



Introduction



Health is more than a number on a scale. Eating well, moving your body, maintaining a healthy weight and feeling good are all important. This guidebook will provide tips to help you achieve health — on and off the scale.

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A healthy lifestyle

What comes to mind when you imagine a healthy version of yourself? Do you see yourself eating well? Working out? Feeling good? Maybe you're already pretty fit and looking to continue on that road. Or maybe you're just getting started. No matter what, healthy habits matter. And when you practice such habits, it's easier to reach and maintain a healthy weight.

Your weight matters

Many people focus on their weight because they want to look good. But your weight may be tied to other health issues that impact your overall wellness. In fact, a healthy weight is linked to:

- Better heart health
- Lowered risk of cancer
- Improved sleep
- Longer lifespan
- Reduced risk of diabetes

When weight doesn't matter

Here's the thing — many people get hung up on weight. It's easy to step on the scale and have that number affect how you feel about yourself. And while your weight can impact your health, it doesn't define you. It won't tell you if you're a good person or if you're living a satisfying life.

Your weight is only one measure of wellness. It's important, but it's just one piece of the big picture.

¹How overweight and obesity impacts your health. Available at: cdc.gov. Accessed December 2025





Your healthy lifestyle checklist

It's easy to make everyone and everything else a priority. But when you stop taking care of yourself, your health can suffer and this can make it harder to live the life you want. Whether you're looking for a health tune-up or a major overhaul, make time to:

- **Talk to your doctor.** Before you alter your eating or exercise routines, it's important to get a check-up from your doctor. You'll be able to find out if it's safe for you to change your diet and activity level. And your doctor can help you identify any potential health issues.
- **Get support.** It can be hard to make changes on your own. Talk to supportive friends and family about your goals, join a support group or get involved with an online forum.
- **Find your motivation.** Why do you want to be healthy? The answer is different for everyone. Write down the reasons you want to be at a certain weight. Look at them to help boost your motivation.
- **Know yourself.** Are there certain emotions or places that trigger poor choices for you? Do you use food as a reward? What kind of workouts do you like? When are you most likely to work out? The more you know about yourself, the easier it is to stay focused on your wellness journey.
- **Educate yourself.** Learn about nutrition, how different foods affect you and what gives you energy. When you know more, you can make healthier choices.
- **Focus on the positive.** We all have good days and bad days. Guilt and negativity can be as unhealthy as straying from your goals. Every moment is a chance to start fresh. Forgive yourself, move on and let go of "all or nothing" thinking. No one's perfect.

Healthy lifestyles don't come in a "one-size-fits-all" package. The more supports, information and self-awareness you have, the easier it is to set and keep good habits.





Understanding your weight



There are several factors that impact your weight. And when you understand your weight, it paves the way for healthier choices.²

Find your BMI

You may have heard of the Body Mass Index (BMI). BMI gives many people a quick and easy way to see if they're in a healthy weight range. It's calculated by dividing your weight in pounds by the square of your height in inches. You can visit [this BMI calculator](#) or [go to this chart](#) to find your number.

But BMI is not a perfect tool. It can't detect how much fat or muscle you have or how healthy you are. Some athletes have a BMI that looks too high because they have so much muscle. Whereas an inactive person may have a "healthy" BMI but have too much body fat.

Waist circumference

In addition to your weight, the amount of fat you carry around your midsection can affect your health. Having too much abdominal fat can increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes, stroke and heart disease.²

How much abdominal fat may be too much? Women with a waist size greater than 35 inches and men with a waist size greater than 40 inches may be at greater risk.² To get your number, place a tape just above your hipbones and measure right after you breathe out.

²Healthy weight. Available at: cdc.gov. Accessed December 2025.



Understanding your weight

What's your risk?

We know that a too-high BMI and a too-high waist circumference can put you at risk for developing health problems. But BMI is not a perfect measure. And neither is waist circumference. Putting them together may help you get an idea of your own level of risk. This chart may help you see where you stand:³

Classification	BMI	Obesity class	Men waist 40" or less and women waist 35" or less and risk of health problems	Men waist over 40" and women waist over 35" and risk of health problems
Underweight	Under 18.5			
Healthy weight	18.5 – 24.9			
Overweight	25 – 29.9		Increased	High
Obesity	30 – 34.9	I	High	Very high
	35 – 39.9	II	Very high	Very high
Extreme obesity	40 +	III	Extremely high	Extremely high

Not where you want to be? That's okay. This chart is just a starting point. You'll get the most accurate snapshot of your health from your doctor. They can do more than just weigh you and measure your waist. A doctor can discuss your lifestyle and provide a clear picture of your health risks.

Being healthy doesn't have to be a battle. Focus on your overall wellness, not just your weight.



³Classification of overweight and obesity BMI, waist circumference, and associated disease risks. Available at: pro.aace.com. Accessed December 2025.



Understanding your weight

Weight gain factors

Many different factors can affect your weight. These include:

- **Diet.** The amount and quality of the food you eat can influence your weight.
- **Physical activity.** Your body was designed for movement. If you live a sedentary lifestyle and never work out, this can cause you to gain weight.
- **Genetics.** Some people are born with blue eyes and some people are born with body types that are more likely to gain weight. Some body shapes gain more weight around the midsection.
- **Sleep.** A lack of sleep can cause you to put on extra pounds. Being tired makes it harder to work out and make healthy food choices. And it disrupts the hormones that affect your appetite, making you feel hungrier than you would with a good night's rest.
- **Medications.** Some medicines, such as steroids, may cause weight gain as a side effect.
- **Environment.** Being around people or places that aren't healthy for you can impact your health. If you live in an unhealthy environment, it can make it easier to gain unwanted pounds.
- **Medical issues.** Some medical problems, like hypothyroidism, polycystic ovary syndrome and diabetes can contribute to weight gain.⁴

While things like genetics and medications may be outside of your control, you can still make choices that affect your health and your weight. Focus on what you can control — like your diet, activity and sleep. Meet with your doctor to see how you're doing. And be sure to make your health a priority every day.

Take control of emotional eating

Have you ever polished off a bag of chips while you sat in front of the TV? Or perhaps you've tried to get your money's worth at the buffet?

Emotional eating tends to happen when we're stressed, bored or ignoring our body's signals that we've had enough. The following tips will help increase your awareness and reduce the likelihood of emotional eating:

- **Keep a food journal and write down everything you eat.** Yes, everything! This keeps you conscious of your daily choices and will make you aware of what, when and why you're eating.
- **Write down how you feel just before and after you eat.** This may help you understand your mood-food connection.
- **Listen to your body.** Is your stomach empty? Is it growling? Could you just be thirsty? Sometimes we mistake thirst for hunger. Eat slowly and stop when you're full.
- **Keep a list of things you can do when you have the urge to emotionally eat.** You might include brushing your teeth, going for a walk or writing in a journal.
- **Try to exercise, meditate or take a few deep breaths** to reduce stress-induced eating.
- **Keep an eye on portion control.** Look at the serving size on the container. Use a smaller plate. When eating out, order a smaller size meal or take half of it home for tomorrow's lunch.

Many people eat as a way to deal with stress and other feelings. But with awareness and coping skills, you can be in control of your well-being.

⁴Conditions that can cause weight gain. Available at: webmd.com. Accessed December 2025.



The basics of nutrition

It's easy to get confused by diets. Should you cut carbohydrates? Eat low fat? Stop eating gluten? The truth is, no one diet works for everyone. But here's some basic nutrition information that applies to many people.

What's in a balanced diet

Macronutrients are the basic structural elements of food. Food is made up of three macronutrients:

- Protein
- Fat
- Carbohydrates (carbs)

Different foods have different macros. You can see the make-up of a food item by checking its food label or looking it up on a program like MyFitnessPal.*

Each macronutrient serves a different purpose. And your body needs all three to function the way it should. So strive for quality macronutrients and balance. Each has a role to play in a well-balanced diet.

Protein

Protein is the building block of your body. Each time you move or expend energy, you break down your body's tissue. You need protein to build it back up. This helps you create and maintain lean muscle. Protein also helps you feel full longer. Get protein from meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, soy and dairy.

⁵Fose, C. and Gibson, J. [How to calculate protein intake](#). Benefits of high-protein diets for weight loss. Available at: wikihow.com Accessed December 2025.

*Recommendations vary based on age, lifestyle and health history

**MyFitnessPal is a registered trademark of MyFitnessPal, Inc.

Everyone's body is unique and the amount of protein you need can vary. Most experts agree you should get about 0.8 – 1.0 gram of protein per kilogram of your body weight per day.** So take your weight and multiply it by 0.36 to get an approximate amount.⁵ You can go to this [calculator](#) to find your number.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates provide your body with quick and easy fuel, especially during intense activity. Many carbohydrates come from low quality, processed sources. And if you eat too many carbs, you may experience a spike in your blood sugar. This can lead to high insulin levels and weight gain.

So it's important to seek out quality carbs that contain fiber, vitamins and minerals. The fiber will help your body break down the carbohydrates more slowly. This will make you feel full longer and provide you more sustainable energy. Get carbohydrates from vegetables, unrefined grains and fruit.

Again, people may need different amounts of carbohydrates. But most experts agree you should get about 120–150 grams of carbohydrates each day or about 30–45 grams per meal.**





The basics of nutrition

Fat

Fat gets a bad rap. Many people think that eating fat makes you overweight. But fat is the body's main energy source. And it helps keep your brain, skin and hair healthy. Fat also helps support your immune system, insulates your organs and helps your body absorb vitamins A, D, E and K. But, like with carbs, quality matters.



High-quality fats can help curb your sugar cravings and give your body clean fuel to burn. Low-quality fats can be a source of inflammation. So if you're already prone to inflammation, eating unhealthy fats can cause a flare-up.

Your body needs both saturated and unsaturated fats. So what should you reach for? And which ones should you avoid?

- **Healthy saturated fats.** Coconut oil, sustainably sourced palm oil, grass-fed meat and dairy, pastured poultry.
- **Unhealthy saturated fats.** Saturated fats from unhealthy animals, any fats with a label stating it's been "refined."
- **Healthy unsaturated fats.** Salmon, sardines, pastured poultry, grass-fed meat, egg yolks, walnuts, olives and olive oil, avocado and avocado oil, almonds.
- **Unhealthy unsaturated fats.** Vegetable oils, canola oil

Nutritionists suggest people get about 10-20 grams of fat per meal or 50-80 grams per day.*

Sugar

Lots of us love sugar. And many "low fat" food products are high in sugar so they taste good. But sugar can create a few problems for us. If you regularly eat sugar it can:

- Add to inflammation in the body
- Lead to faster aging and chronic disease
- Increase hunger

Sugar is actually an anti-nutrient. Your body has to use energy to process it and sugar doesn't give back any nutrients to your body. This can leave your body starved for nutrients and keep you feeling hungry. This doesn't apply to natural sugar that comes in a whole-food form (like in fruit). Those sugars are packed with healthy, natural nutrients that leave you satisfied.

We know that sweets tend to have high sugar content. But sugar can hide in sneaky places. You might be surprised to find it in your bread, condiments, crackers, pasta, granola bars, soups, popcorn, skim milk and low-fat dairy products.

And what about sugar substitutes? Some of these, like Splenda** and aspartame have been linked with weight gain.⁶ And they may make you crave more sweets. If you really want something sweet, consider fruit, raw honey, coconut sugar, stevia or xylitol. (Xylitol can be toxic to animals, so be sure to keep it away from pets.)



⁶ Sifferlin, Alexandra. [Artificial sweeteners are linked to weight gain — not weight loss](#). Available at: Time.com. Accessed December 2025.

*Recommendations vary based on age, lifestyle and health history

**Splenda is a registered trademark of Heartland Food Products Group, LLC.



The basics of nutrition

Micronutrients

Macronutrients are the large, energy-giving calories and elements in our food. Micronutrients are the vitamins, minerals, trace elements, phytochemicals and antioxidants we need for good health. These include:

- **Vitamin D** — Boosts brain health and immunity
- **Omega 3s** — Decrease inflammation
- **B vitamins** — Support energy production
- **Vitamin C** — Prevents damage to the body and supports it against stress
- **Magnesium** — Supports sleep and muscle relaxation
- **Antioxidants and phytochemicals** — Protect your cells from disease

Can you take a multi-vitamin and call it a day? It's best to get these micronutrients from your food. Many of their benefits are lost when you take them in pill form. And it's possible to consume toxic amounts if you take them on their own. Vitamins should be taken under a doctor's guidance.



Talk to an expert

Your age, lifestyle and health might mean you have different needs. So it's a good idea to talk with a doctor before changing your diet.

You might also want to speak with a registered dietitian (RD). You'll get personalized advice that's tailored to your unique needs. And an RD can help you look at your health metrics and lifestyle to find what works for you.





The basics of exercise

Many of us wake up, sit in a car, sit at a desk, sit in our cars again and end our days sitting on the couch. But your body was designed to move. Physical activity is an important part of your journey to optimal health and a healthy weight.

Sitting is the new smoking

Our ancestors would be shocked to see how we spend our days. They spent their time hunting, gathering, farming and doing physical activities just to live. While they were moving to get things done, they also kept their bodies healthy. In fact, excessive sitting has been linked to:⁷

- Obesity
- Too much fat around the waist
- High blood pressure
- High blood sugar
- Abnormal cholesterol levels
- Increased risk of cancer and heart disease

Getting started

They say you've got to "walk before you can run" and that's true of an exercise routine. If you try to do too much right away, you can get injured. Speak with a doctor to learn what your body can safely do. Once you have a handle on that, consider these steps:

- **Think about your goals.** Do you want to play with your kids more? Have more energy? Climb the stairs without getting out of breath? Find what's driving you and choose activities to help you get there.

- **Start slowly.** Many beginners take on too much. This can leave you feeling sore, tired, injured and wanting to give up. Go for walks and work up to longer distances. Lift light weights and work toward something heavier. Or wear a tracker and increase your steps each week.

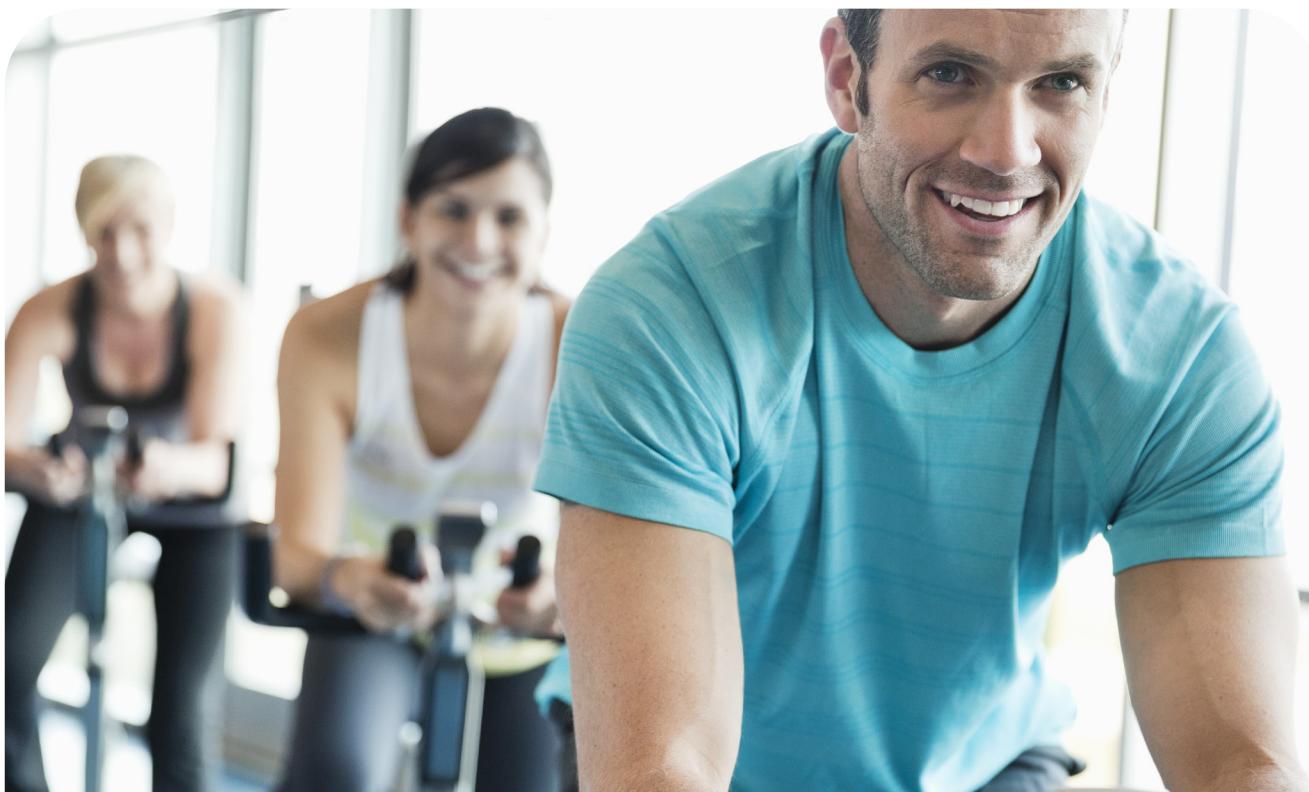
- **Try new things.** Do you think you'll like exercise classes? Dancing? Yoga? Kickboxing? CrossFit[®]? These days, you can find all kinds of activities. Try different options to see what you like. Many fitness centers offer free introductory sessions. After all, you're more likely to continue activities you enjoy.

- **Focus on the habit.** Try to get into a routine. Even if you work out for 20 minutes, you can start to maintain the momentum of a new, healthy habit. Pretty soon, exercise will be part of your life.

- **Talk to an expert.** You may want to meet with a personal trainer. They can show you how to use gym equipment and help you set goals.

⁷Laskowski, Edward. What are the risks of sitting too much? Available at: mayoclinic.org. Accessed December 2025.

*CrossFit is a registered trademark of CrossFit, Inc.





The basics of exercise

Choosing a gym

You don't need a gym to keep moving. All you need are some comfy shoes and to make the time. After all, you can always go for a walk, run or do workout videos at home.

But many people like the classes, equipment and community of a gym setting. Here are some things to consider when choosing a gym:

- **Convenience.** You're more likely to go to a gym that's easy to get to. See if you can find one close to work or home.
- **Child care.** If you have young kids, you may want to find a gym that offers child care. This will allow you to work out without worrying about finding a babysitter.
- **Cost.** Some people think, "If I spend all this money then I'll go." That isn't always true. A local recreation center may be a more affordable option. Check out if your employer offers discounts on gym memberships.
- **Extras.** What kinds of classes do they provide? Is there a pool, sauna or steam room? Do they offer a training orientation? Take a tour to see what's available.

Many gyms and fitness centers offer a trial membership or class for free. This is a great way to see if you want to make the commitment before you join.



Understand the terms

Even people who've been working out for a while may be confused about certain fitness terms. Here are some words you're likely to hear:⁸

- **Aerobic or cardiovascular ("cardio") activity.** This refers to activity that gets your heart pumping and makes you breathe faster. Common activities include running, walking, rowing, cycling, swimming and jumping. Cardio burns calories and can improve heart health.
- **Strength or weight or resistance training.** This activity can help you build muscle and get stronger. It includes lifting weights and movements where you lift your body weight (such as push-ups). Strength training doesn't just make you stronger. It boosts your metabolism, protects your bones and helps you lose fat.
- **Flexibility training.** These workouts involve stretching your muscles. Stretching, yoga, tai chi, pilates and barre often include flexibility training. Flexibility activities can help you improve your balance and prevent injuries.
- **High impact/low impact.** "Impact" refers to your body hitting the ground, which creates stress on the joints and muscles. So a "high impact" workout will often involve both feet leaving the ground at the same time (such as jumping and running). "Low impact" workouts typically include those where you have one or both feet on the ground or put little pressure on your joints (such as walking, swimming and cycling).
- **Warm-up.** This is the period of time in which you get your body ready to work out. Low intensity activities send blood to your muscles, joints and ligaments. These include high-knees, butt-kicks or easy walking.
- **Cool down.** Once you're done with your workout, it's important to cool your body down. This can help prevent tight muscles, soreness and injury.



Find the right exercise for you

There are lots of different exercise options for you to choose from. The goal is to find one that you enjoy and keeps you coming back for more. Here's a brief overview of some available choices.

- **HIIT.** “HIIT” stands for “high-intensity interval training.” This involves bursts of high-intensity exercise for a short period of time where you go all out, followed by a period of active recovery. HIIT burns fat in less time than low-intensity workouts.
- **CrossFit.*** CrossFit appeals to both beginners and highly fit people. Trainers post new workouts each day that include strength training and aerobic activity. Many people like CrossFit because it pushes their limits and provides a supportive community.
- **Orangetheory® Fitness (OTF).**** OTF gyms include cardio and strength training workouts led by an instructor. But instead of counting your reps, you’re hooked up to a heart rate monitor and try to hit their designated “orange” zone of effort. You spend 30 minutes on a treadmill or stationary bike and then 30 minutes doing strength moves like squats and crunches.
- **Yoga.** Yoga involves holding a series of poses and breathing deeply as you move. It can help you gain balance, flexibility and strength while reducing stress. You may see other classes that include elements of yoga.

• **Pilates.** This workout involves a series of movements that strengthen your core (midsection, back and sides) and increase flexibility. Pilates can be done on a mat or on a machine, known as a reformer.

• **Barre.** Barre classes provide a full-body workout involving ballet-inspired moves. They may also include movements from Pilates and yoga. Barre increases strength, balance and range of motion.

• **Spinning.** Spin classes refer to high-intensity biking on a stationary bike. This is a cardio workout that's often done in a gym setting, but some specialized bikes and apps can make spinning available to you at home.

• **SilverSneakers.***** SilverSneakers classes are geared toward older adults. They may include cardio, strength training or stretching. Some Medicare plans help cover the cost of these classes.

• **Zumba.**[†] You don't need skills or rhythm to enjoy this upbeat Latin-inspired dance party. Get your heart pumping, burn calories and have fun.

There's no one ideal workout for everyone. So try different things. Mix them up and find what works for you.

*CrossFit is a registered trademark of CrossFit, Inc.

**OrangeTheory is a registered trademark of OrangeTheory Fitness.

***Silver Sneakers is a registered trademark of Tivity Health, Inc.TM

[†]Zumba is a registered trademark of Zumba Fitness, LLC.



The basics of exercise

Making time for exercise

A bestselling book, *The first 20 minutes* by Gretchen Reynolds, explains you don't need to spend hours at the gym to see the benefits of exercise. In fact, she says you get the most benefit in the first 20 minutes. In just 20 minutes, you can lower stress, reduce depression and find greater happiness.

So find quick and easy ways to squeeze in more activity. You can:

- Put workouts on your calendar
- Arrange to meet a friend
- Focus on consistency
- Include family, friends and pets
- Set a timer and move each hour
- Take the stairs
- Sit on a stability ball at work
- Start with five minutes and work your way up

Small changes add up over time. So keep moving. It's what your body was designed for.





The mental side of weight management

We can be our own worst enemies. We'll be doing well and then we sabotage ourselves. Or we know what to do but we just can't seem to do it. Let's talk about some common mental barriers to weight management and how to overcome them.

Motivation

So you want to get healthier. You know what you need to get healthier. But you're missing one important thing — motivation. Maybe you start strong and then you fall back into old habits. Or maybe you just can't muster up the enthusiasm you want. Consider these tips:

- **Find your “why.”** Why do you want to be healthy? What's driving you? Your reasons will be unique and personal to you. The more you understand your “why,” the easier it can be to find your motivation.
- **Picture your desired outcome.** Close your eyes and visualize yourself reaching your health goals. Make the vision as specific as possible. See yourself making healthy choices.
- **Surround yourself with inspiration.** Motivation comes and goes. Find people and things that inspire you. Join an online forum, local club or support group for encouragement. Look at inspirational pictures, quotes and videos.

Know yourself

Your current habits are there for a reason. And it takes time to create new habits. But when you know yourself and what works, you can make healthy changes.

- **Understand your current habits.** People behave the way they do for a reason. Maybe food brings you comfort. Maybe you feel guilty for working out instead of being home with your family. Maybe you lack social supports. When you know your barriers, you can find healthy ways to address them.
- **Identify your triggers.** Do you reach for sugary food when you're stressed? Do you lose all exercise motivation once you're home from work? Do you eat mindlessly in front of the TV each night? Look for weak spots and decide how you'll manage them.
- **Be honest about your readiness.** Do you go through these steps and still feel unmotivated? It's possible that you don't want to make a change right now. And that's okay. These tips will be here when you're ready.





The mental side of weight management



Now it's time to build some new habits!

Here are a few things to consider:

- **Manage your stress.** Stress can make you crave sugary and unhealthy foods. Take time for self-care.
- **Sleep tight.** Lack of sleep can lead to hormone changes that cause you to feel extra hungry and overeat. Make sleep a priority.
- **Eat mindfully.** Take time to slow down and savor each bite. It's not just about what you eat, but how you eat it.
- **Hydrate.** Sometimes thirst feels like hunger. Try to drink half your body weight in ounces every day. You may need to adjust that number based on your climate, how much you exercise and other factors.
- **Find support.** Surround yourself with people who support you and your wellness goals.

Don't give up

No one's perfect. You won't make healthy choices all the time. Set a personal goal. If you have a setback, shake it off. Take a moment to learn from your experience. Healthy living isn't about finding the right diet or the perfect workout. It's about changing how you do things on a day-to-day basis so you can feel good and achieve your goals — on and off the scale.



Resources

If you're looking to learn more about how to achieve a healthy weight, here are some resources to help:

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND)

AND is made up of nutrition professionals. It provides information on nutrition-related topics for adults, seniors and children. You can use their "Find an Expert" option to search for registered dieticians in your area. Go to the [**AND website**](#) to find more information.

Super Kids Nutrition

This site provides recipes, healthy eating tips, activities and information for children and families. Visit the [**Super Kids Nutrition website**](#) to learn more.

Team Nutrition

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), this site provides information to help improve child nutrition. Go to the [**Team Nutrition website**](#) to access their resources.

Overeaters Anonymous*

If you struggle with compulsive eating, Overeaters Anonymous groups can provide you with support. Go to the [**Overeaters Anonymous website**](#) to see if their services are a good fit and to find a local meeting.

MyPlate.gov

Find tips, quizzes, body weight planners and more to help you make healthier choices. Visit [**myplate.gov**](#) to learn more.

Weight-control Information Network (WIN)

WIN provides the public with scientifically-based weight-loss information. Go to the [**WIN website**](#) to find tips for eating well, exercising and more.

Obesity Action Coalition (OAC)

The OAC offers education and advocacy on issues surrounding obesity. Learn about obesity causes and treatments at the [**OAC website**](#).



*Overeaters Anonymous is a registered trademark of Overeaters Anonymous, Inc.



Take a step to a healthier, happier you.

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