A Practical Plan for Weight Management

For adults working with their health care team

Weight management is about health, not blame. Your plan should fit your needs, food preferences, budget and daily life. Start with one or two changes you can keep doing.

Why weight loss can be difficult

Genes, health conditions, medicines, sleep, stress and access to food and activity all affect weight. After weight loss, your body may need fewer calories and hunger may increase. A plateau or weight regain is a reason to review your plan, not a personal failure. [1,2]

Choose a realistic goal

Ask your clinician whether weight loss is right for you. Even a modest loss, such as 5% of starting weight, may improve blood pressure, cholesterol or blood sugar. For a person who weighs 200 pounds, 5% is 10 pounds. [1]

Gradual loss of about 1 to 2 pounds a week is often more sustainable, but progress varies. This is not a required weekly target. Track energy, strength, sleep and health measures as well as weight. [1]

Build meals that work for you

- Choose a varied eating pattern with vegetables, fruit, whole grains and protein foods such as beans, fish, eggs or lean meat. Portions matter; no single food needs to define your success. [2]
- Replace some sugary drinks with water or an unsweetened drink. Plan convenient meals and snacks that fit your budget. Ask for a dietitian referral if you need help. [1,3]
- There is no universal calorie, carbohydrate, protein or water target. Your clinician can tailor amounts, especially if you have kidney or heart disease or a prescribed fluid limit.

Move in ways your body allows

Start where you are, even with a short walk or chair activity. Work toward at least 150 minutes of moderate activity each week and muscle-strengthening activity on 2 days, if safe for you. You can divide activity into short sessions. [2]

If you have a medical condition or activity limits, ask what is safe. Movement can improve health even when the scale does not change. [2]

Make room for rest and support

Keep a regular sleep routine. Notice stress, hunger and situations that make eating harder. A supportive friend, counselor or health professional can help you plan for setbacks. [1,3]

My Next Steps

Choose small actions with your health care team. Adjust the plan when your health, schedule or circumstances change.

My plan for the next two weeks

A health goal that matters to me: _____

One food or drink change I want to try: _____

An activity I can safely do: _____

How often and for how long: _____

A barrier I expect and one possible solution: _____

_____

A person or resource that can help: _____

Review progress without judgment

If tracking helps, note meals, activity, sleep or weight in a simple log. If tracking causes anxiety, guilt or restrictive eating, discuss another approach. At follow-up, ask what is working, what is difficult and what needs to change.

Follow-up date: _____ Clinic contact: _____

When to ask for more help

Tell your clinician about your medical conditions and all medicines and supplements. Do not stop medicines on your own. Some people benefit from structured programs, prescription weight-management treatment or bariatric surgery. These options require an individual assessment and ongoing follow-up. [3,4]

Ask for a tailored plan before changing food intake or activity if you use medicines that can cause low blood sugar, are pregnant or breastfeeding, have frailty or unintentional weight loss, or have a history of an eating disorder. This adult handout is not a weight-loss plan for children.

Avoid crash diets and products that promise rapid loss without lasting changes. Discuss supplements with your clinician before using them. [3]

Questions to bring to my visit

Would a dietitian or structured program help me? Could a health condition or medicine be affecting my weight? Is treatment beyond lifestyle changes appropriate? What follow-up and costs should I expect?

Trusted information

[1] CDC Steps for Losing Weight Read online

[2] NIDDK Eating and Physical Activity Read online

[3] NIDDK Choosing a Safe and Successful Weight Loss Program Read online

[4] NHLBI Overweight and Obesity Treatment Read online

General education, not an individual treatment prescription. Information checked November 14, 2026. No product or program is endorsed.