Tips for Making Healthy Changes Last

Many people find it difficult to make health changes lasting habits. Find out ways to keep you on track to success.

Many people who have made healthy behavior changes to improve diet and physical activity find these hard to maintain. Below are some of the more common “derailers” that can cause you to move off course.

**Derailer: Boredom**

Boredom with your diet or activities can cause you to overeat or lose interest.

**Getting back on track**

- Find a partner to join you in physical activity.
- Plan and prepare meals with family or friends.
- Try a healthy new recipe each week.
- Purchase a variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Challenge yourself by lifting heavier weights, walking longer, or trying a new exercise class.
- Reward yourself for reaching your goals, but do not use food as a reward.
- Track your changes (ways you have improved your time, strength, flexibility, weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, waist measurement, attitude).

**Derailer: Stress/anxiety**

Stress/anxiety can cause you to overeat or drink and eat less healthfully.

**Getting back on track**

- Talk to someone about what is bothering you.
- Increase your physical activity; try yoga, walking, hiking, bowling, or bike riding.
- Get 8 hours of sleep each night.
- Write your feelings in a journal when you are eating. Write the time and amounts of food eaten. Look for patterns. Those who successfully keep weight off in the long term maintain food and activity diaries to help monitor themselves and their weight.

**Derailer: Feeling guilty**

Feeling guilty if healthy behaviors like physical activity or healthy cooking classes take time away from family or other responsibilities.

**Getting back on track**

- Scheduling time for yourself to maintain your health is important.
- Invite friends and family to join you.
- Select a time of day for physical activity that doesn’t interfere with family time.

*Tip: To have energy to take care of your family or work, take care of yourself first by scheduling time for a healthy activity.*

Track your health behavior choices and see if you find any patterns that you may be unaware of or want to change. In rating hunger, if you find you rate yourself low, you may be eating for other reasons (e.g., boredom, stress, social pressure). If you often rate yourself very high, you may be eating too infrequently by skipping meals, or you may need to plan a snack. Most people should eat every 4-5 hours while awake to maintain peak mental and physical functioning and avoid overeating. Planning regular times for meals, snacks, and physical activity helps make your healthy changes last.
Check Out New Healthy Resources

ChooseMyPlate.gov and Healthfinder.gov offer many new recipes, links to recipes, physical activities, and ways to monitor your progress.

Examine Your Choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time ate/where/with whom</th>
<th>How hungry (1=low,10=high)? Mood</th>
<th>Amount eaten</th>
<th>What I plan to change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00/at office/alone</td>
<td>8; slightly bored</td>
<td>1/2 cup carrots, 1 cup spaghetti and 1/2 cup sauce, 1 small banana, 1 can soda</td>
<td>Add 1 cup skim milk or low-fat yogurt, cut out soda. Eat lunch with a friend or coworker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of physical activity</th>
<th>Mood/what I did</th>
<th>Improvements: strength, energy, flexibility</th>
<th>What I plan to change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Tired/jogged 30 minutes</td>
<td>Felt I had more energy for the day</td>
<td>Add another day of jogging per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My Goal

______________________________

______________________________

Sources


Prepared by Lynn James, senior extension educator. Reviewed by Megan Wall, dietetic intern, and Sharon McDonald, senior extension educator and food safety specialist.