



9 Ways to Mentally Prepare for Weight Loss

The battle for a slimmer you is often won or lost in your head. Before you start a diet, psych yourself up for a lifestyle change with these prep steps.

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Before you get to enjoy the physical changes that come with [healthy weight loss](#), you first must undergo a mental makeover that helps you break your old bad habits. The key to beginning your transformation is thinking of it properly — you want a true lifestyle change instead of a lose-weight-quick crash diet. Think of your goal as weight *control* and remember that you want to stick to your new healthy diet for the foreseeable future.

“Framing your diet as weight control makes it long-term. It’s not as dramatic or drastic a push to get yourself to a certain weight at any cost,” Brian Quebbemann, MD, founder of the NEW

(Nutrition, Exercise, Wellness) Program in Newport Beach, Calif., says. If you “diet” and set unrealistic expectations, you’ll probably regain any weight lost as soon as you go off the plan. But if you make attainable lifestyle changes, the lost pounds will stay away.

Before you jump into your new lifestyle, prep properly by following this mental checklist for success.

State Your Weight Loss Goals

Having the right mind-set starts with knowing why you want to lose weight. It could be as simple as wanting to look and feel better — dragging around 30 extra pounds makes you tired and lethargic and uncomfortable in your clothes. Or you may have specific health needs, such as lowering your risk for [diabetes](#) or reducing high blood pressure. Getting psyched up about the very real rewards of weight loss builds motivation that makes it easier to stick to your meal plan and exercise routine, explains Heather Bauer, RD, author of *Bread Is the Devil: Win the Weight Loss Battle by Taking Control of Your Diet Demons*.

Hire a Dietitian

When you're ready to lose weight for life, make an appointment to see a registered dietitian, advises Jackie Newgent, RD, a New York City-based nutritionist, author of *Big Green Cookbook*, and a healthy-cooking instructor at the Institute of Culinary Education. "You can follow any diet you want and lose weight," she says, "but it might not be the best diet for you or for your health."

Working with a dietitian will enable you to find a weight-loss program that best fits your lifestyle, your [dietary needs](#), and any medical conditions you have and one that includes healthy foods you like and will want to eat. "The reason most people fall off the wagon is because they've chosen a plan that's not for them," Newgent says. A dietitian can also help you get mentally ready for the challenge ahead.

If you're worried about the cost, check with your insurance company. Some plans provide reimbursement for nutrition counseling.

Ink Your Weight Loss Meal Plan

Once you've decided on a weight-loss plan, map out all the steps needed to implement it. At the beginning of each week, create a [meal plan](#) for your diet that you'll use as your guide for grocery shopping, cooking, eating out, and avoiding unplanned indulgences. "Having that plan helps you reach for the right foods," Newgent says. If you know you'll be meeting friends for dinner at a restaurant, Bauer suggests going online to look at the menu. Plan what you will order to avoid being tempted when you get there. Pick two healthy entrees, she says, so that if the restaurant is out of your first choice, you're not stuck.

Invest in a Personal Trainer

Exercise is an essential part of any weight-loss program, says Scott White, a personal trainer in Scottsdale, Ariz. But when most people think about weight loss, they think about what foods they will eat rather than what exercises they will do — and skipping exercise could be sabotaging their dietary efforts. Working with a trainer — or just setting up a free consultation through your gym — will help you map out an exercise routine that you enjoy and find ways to fit it into your busy schedule, White says. At the beginning of each week, mark every workout session in your calendar, just as you would a hairdresser or dentist appointment — you're more likely to stick to your plan when you see it in black and white.

Prepare to Log Your Food and Fitness Activities

Whether you use an online tool, a mobile app, or simple pen and paper (maybe this is the excuse you've been waiting for to get that iPad!), logging your diet and exercise activity is key to weight-loss success. Whichever format you choose, promise yourself to religiously outline and track every aspect of your weight loss process, from every bite you take to every rep in your **exercise routine**. If you're faithful about recording what you eat for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks, you'll see patterns and routines emerge. You can analyze them to find solutions to the problems that have derailed your previous efforts to lose weight, Bauer says.

Set a Realistic Timetable for Weight Loss

The more realistic you are about your **weight-loss goals**, the more likely you are to reach them. Remember that you're developing a lifelong strategy, so don't set unattainable time limits — forget the concept of dropping 10 pounds in 10 days. And while you might need to ultimately lose 50 pounds, that goal can be overwhelming at first, Quebbemann says. A better mind-set is to focus on losing 1 to 2 pounds a week, and maintaining that consistent rate of weight loss over weeks if not months.

Approach exercise goals the same way. If you haven't exercised for a while, starting off running a marathon would be a huge mistake — if you're out of shape, even running a mile on your first day could backfire. Start small: Decide that you'll walk for 15 to 30 minutes five times a week, and then ramp up your schedule as you make measurable progress.

Believe in Yourself

You may have failed with weight loss in the past, but that doesn't mean you're going to fail now. Sure, there will be days ahead when you'll **eat more than you should** or skip a

planned workout, but it's essential to stay positive and move forward with your plan. Realize that your weight-loss goals will take time to achieve, but believe that you can go the distance one milestone at a time, Newgent suggests. Even losing 5 pounds is good for your health and can give you the impetus to work toward the next 5-pound drop. Recognize that weight loss rarely occurs in a straight line, and if you overeat one day, don't berate yourself — just get back on your program at the very next meal.

Pick Motivating Rewards

After breaking your weight-loss goals into attainable increments, decide on a **small reward** you'll give yourself for reaching each one, Quebbemann suggests. No, not a cupcake from your favorite bakery — don't repeat old patterns by making it a food reward. Instead, choose other types of favorite treats, such as getting a relaxing massage or pedicure, going to a concert, or buying a new fashion accessory that helps you break away from your "fat clothes." Write your rewards down as part of your master plan, just as you do your diet and exercise routine, Newgent says.

Create a Weight Loss Support Network

Everything is easier when you have the **support and encouragement** of family and friends, and that includes embarking on a new weight-loss lifestyle. You don't have to announce your diet to the world, but you should confide in those closest to you, like your lunch group at work. Tell them why you're trying to eat healthy and how they can help you stay on track, Bauer says. If you let them know how much reaching your weight-loss goals means to you, they'll want to do what they can to help. And if you have a friend who is trying to lose weight too, make a pact to text each other at crucial times during the day, and you'll both stay on track.