



Sticking With It

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way. Now that you are healthy and have reached your goal, what would you tell yourself to help keep you on track? This letter might include the health complications that you were facing, activities that you were not able to participate in or even how you felt when you were less healthy. It is also important to include how you feel currently and your accomplishments.

Losing weight and making healthy lifestyle changes is difficult, but rewarding. It is nice to be able to see the results of the changes you are making, whether that's changing numbers on a scale, your clothes fitting better, or being able to do physical tasks that you previously were not able to do. Maintaining these changes is different. Successful maintenance is often accompanied by little or no change...That's the point, after all! It requires a change in mindset and a new way of marking success. It also comes with its own set of challenges. The Memorial Weight Loss & Wellness Center is here to continue to support you as you enter this new phase.

Once you have reached your goals, you may be looking forward to relaxing a bit, to take your foot off the gas pedal and let yourself coast for awhile. It is true that once new healthy choices become established healthy habits you do not need to spend quite as much mental energy on actively making changes. It is also true that becoming disengaged from the daily decision-making that helped you achieve your goals in the first place can lead to regain of weight and let you slip back in to unhealthy patterns. That's where we come in. We at Memorial have resources available to help you during your maintenance phase.

Staying involved in the MWLWC community is one way to continue to be inspired to make daily choices that support your maintenance goals. Our Facebook page is one place where you can find motivational quotes, recipes, articles, and other content designed to help you stay excited and energized. Our website is another place you can access educational materials and a calendar of events. Our monthly support group is another opportunity to connect with others who are focused on maintaining their changes in person. And, of course, you are always welcome to come in to the center to work with our providers if you find yourself slipping back in to old habits or if you just need some new ideas. We recommend coming in every three months during the first year of maintenance and then at least once a year after. Maintaining the results you have achieved isn't easy, but it is worth it. We are so glad you have chosen us to help you continue your journey.

Thank you,
Memorial Weight Loss & Wellness Center

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Maintaining a Healthy Weight

Biological Challenges of Weight Maintenance

Source: SparkPeople.com; Dean Anderson, Behavioral Psychology Expert

OK, you've reached your weight-loss goal. Congratulations—you're halfway there! Now all you have to do is make sure you're one of the five to 10 percent of "weight-losers" who manage to keep it off over time.

So, what are you going to do now? You probably have more questions than answers: Is it OK to stop tracking calories every day? How much more can you eat? Can you cut back on exercise? How often should you weigh yourself? How do you know if you've really made the kind of "lifestyle change" that will make your weight loss permanent? And most importantly, what does it really take to maintain your weight loss?

Coming up with the right answers—for you—to these and related questions is not always easy. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and what works in one set of circumstances may change as circumstances change. To give yourself the best chance of keeping the weight off for good, you'll need to understand what can make this so hard to do. The challenges of weight management involve both biological and psychological factors.

The "Set Point" Problem

Some people start regaining weight simply because they start eating a little bit more and exercising a little less, often without even noticing it. But let's assume you've really taken to heart the idea of a permanent lifestyle change—does this mean you can expect smooth sailing? Sadly, no. For many, the biggest and most difficult challenge of keeping the weight off may be the fact that your body thinks you have lost too much weight, and is determined to put at least some of it back on.

One of the leading theories about obesity and weight management, called the "set point theory," tells us that every individual has a natural weight—i.e., a weight that your body will try to return to and maintain whenever you have lost weight. Actually, it is a bit misleading to call your set point weight a "natural" weight, because this implies that if you gain a little weight, the natural tendency would be to drop back down again to your normal weight. In fact, gaining weight—especially quite a bit of weight—appears to raise your set point substantially, while losing weight does not automatically lower it again. If you have always gained weight easily, have a history of obesity and/or especially if you have had to struggle with weight plateaus, food cravings and increased appetite, you should expect that keeping it off is going to require some special attention on your part.

▶ **Continue to set goals.** Initially your goals would have been weight-loss oriented, now there is no limit to your goals.

Do not lose the energy, momentum and purpose that your previous goals gave you. Start setting some new goals. If you would like to maintain your weight, is there a new sport or activity that could help you do this? Once you have started, your goal can be to improve in this activity. With your new confidence you might want to go back to school or even learn a new language. If you like biking or running, is there a race that you would like to do? With each race you might challenge yourself to increase your distance or even your time. This can help you to stay focused as you will continue to experience a sense of accomplishment. The main thing to remember is it's not what you do but that you find something that you like to do.

▶ **Pay attention to the numbers.** In maintenance these numbers help to keep you on track. They might include:

Body measures – dress size, waist, hips, neck, arms, fitting into favorite clothes

Performance – more endurance during exercise, doing them at a higher level, jumping higher, walking longer, running faster, playing a sport better

General feeling – rate energy level, rate attitude and outlook, track how often you feel very sleepy during the day, rate your confidence level

Health – blood pressure, cholesterol level, blood sugar level

Intangibles – how you look, compliments you receive, how others respond to you

▶ **Be realistic.** While logging every morsel that entered your mouth and every calorie that you burned might have helped you to lose weight, it could be more challenging after you go into maintenance. Some individuals like to continue to log because it helps to hold them accountable. However some would like a little more freedom. It is important to know what will work best for you.

▶ **Help others.** It is easier to stay focused on being healthier when you are helping someone to do the same thing. This support can be online or in-person.

▶ **Tell your story.** Some people like to blog their progress or journal. The journal can be shared or kept private. You might write in it daily, weekly, monthly or just when you have an experience in which you recognize things that you were not able to do before. This will provide you with a list of your accomplishments and successes.

▶ **Write a letter.** You know yourself better than anyone else. You know the reasons you chose to want to get healthy, and you can recognize your accomplishments along the

Lapse, Relapse, Collapse

Source: *The LEARN Program for Weight Management*

No one is perfect. Often, a minor “lapse” or slip sends a person into feelings of guilt. The guilt then leads to more lapses or “relapse” which could then lead to collapse or complete loss of control. Weight maintenance is no small feat. It’s an ongoing effort. Most people who struggle with weight issues or obesity have experienced the cycle of losing and regaining weight numerous times in their lives. Somehow, this cycle must be broken. There are two ways to combat this cycle. The first is to prevent a lapse from happening and the second is to respond constructively when one does happen. Using self-talk or reframing a “lapse” can prevent the spiral to relapse or even collapse. Recognizing that a lapse is a lapse, not the end of the world, can empower you to get back to your healthy living. Remember, behavior changes are HARD. Making behavior into a habit takes PRACTICE and patience. These habits will take years to develop! Another important element is to take credit when credit is due. Your success is your doing. Giving credit to the program you are involved in or to something else outside of yourself, shifts the responsibility or ownership of your success. By crediting yourself for using the right tools that work for you will empower you to prevent a lapse from becoming a relapse or collapse. Never underestimate the power of...YOU!

Reevaluating Goals

When we first are starting our weight-loss journeys the excitement from the initial weight loss can be quickly ended when the scale stops moving. However the scale has to stop moving at some point right? What about when you reach your goals? We have focused for so long on getting here without thinking about what we will do when this day comes. So what can we do to maintain what we have worked so hard for? The easiest answer is to continue doing what you have done to get here!

In maintenance you will need to make some changes to your eating and exercise so that you are achieving energy balance instead of a calorie deficit to lose weight. That is the main difference in weight maintenance. All of the other principles that you have adapted to get you to where you are will stay the same.

If you have struggled with weight for a long time then this task could be harder than it seems. Making sure that you were making healthy choices that you could stick with should have been the priority in the beginning of your journey. If you stop doing what you have done then the weight will come back and possibly with a few extra pounds.

Even with gradual changes going from weight loss to maintenance can be challenging. Being aware of these challenges and having ways to handle them can make it easier to stay successful.

Your body likely will try to put on some of the weight you have lost. It accomplishes this with a complex set of metabolic adjustments that will cause you to gradually gain weight even though you are maintaining what should be—on paper—a balance between calories ingested and calories expended. Hardly seems fair, right? If you were living 40,000 years ago, before agriculture, supermarkets and fast food, you would have been one of the “lucky” ones whose genes made you a lot more likely to survive hard times. But these days...well, you get the idea.

The good news is that it is NOT impossible to maintain your weight loss. You do not need to become an expert in metabolic biochemistry and food analysis, or eat rabbit food for the rest of your life. However, research has identified three strategies for managing set point problems:

1. Know your caloric target for weight maintenance. The first step towards lowering your set point weight and getting your body to cooperate with weight maintenance is to calculate how many calories you can theoretically eat every day to maintain your present weight. Your Memorial Weight Loss & Wellness Center (MWLWC) team will help you determine your appropriate calorie targets for maintenance based on your current weight and activity regimen.

2. Work up (or down) to this calorie intake gradually. Don’t just assume you can start eating at this maintenance level right away. You need to experiment a little until you figure out what your metabolism will let you get away with. The best approach is to increase your daily calorie intake by 150 to 200 calories (from healthy, low-fat food sources, of course) for one week, and watch the effect that has on your weight. If you continue to lose weight, or your weight holds steady, do the same thing again for another week, and continue doing this until you either reach your estimated maintenance target, or you start gaining weight.

Obviously, you will want to continue (or restart) daily recording of your calories and exercise during this period to keep things accurate. If you have stopped weighing yourself frequently, you may want to start doing that again as well.

3. Exercise, Exercise, Exercise. By far the most important factor in maintaining weight loss, according to the research, is a consistently high level of regular activity and exercise. You need to convince your body that storing energy as fat to protect against potential food shortages in the future is not a smart strategy because the food supply is adequate and you need that energy NOW to keep up with the physical demands of your present environment. Most likely, you will need to increase the intensity and/or duration of your exercise and other daily activity above what you did during the weight-loss phase, so that your caloric expenditure stays a little higher than your maintenance level calorie intake (as determined above).

For most people who are successful at weight maintenance, burning an additional 150 to 200 calories per day (in addition to your normal daily exercise expenditure) seems to do

the trick, though you may need to experiment a little bit to find out what works for you. But—make sure you do NOT reduce your calorie intake below the maintenance level in order to get out of doing more exercise or to “be safe.” To lower your set point weight, you need to avoid restricting calorie intake below your maintenance level, and rely on additional exercise, if necessary, to keep your weight stable.

Other Metabolic Issues

There is some evidence (coming from research on rats) that regaining lost weight is often associated with a change in the normal ratio of fat and carbohydrates used as fuel during various states of rest and activity. Normally, fat is the predominant source of energy at rest and during very light activity, while glucose becomes predominant when intensity of activity increases to moderate and higher levels.

However, rats that are permitted to return to unrestricted eating after weight loss, and which regain weight, show a significant increase in the use of glucose in relation to fat during rest and light activity. If this transfers to human beings (pretty likely), it could mean that the tendency to regain lost weight could depend not only on how many total calories we eat, but also on what we eat and when we eat it.

If our bodies do shift into fat-preservation mode after weight loss, in order to promote weight regain, we might be able to partially counter this effect with dietary strategies. For example, one effect of being in fat-preservation mode is increased appetite, especially for foods high in carbohydrates. To some extent, at least, a diet that relies on multiple smaller meals and is relatively higher in protein may counteract this increase in appetite (protein and frequent smaller meals are both known to increase satiety), and also promote greater utilization of fat stores for energy. We’re not talking Atkins here—just a diet that involves keeping protein near the top of the recommended range (about 30 percent of total calories), carbs at about 50 percent, and fat at around 20 percent. In addition, a diet that emphasizes carbs and meals that are fairly low on the glycemic index, whole grains, beans, nuts and other foods that are high in protein would help counteract these effects.

Finally, remember that everything you’ve heard about the negative effects of chronic stress, inadequate sleep and poor nutrition on weight management will be potentially more significant during weight maintenance.

Maintenance Reminders

Whatever particular challenges this transition presents for you, you can be sure that this new stage of your journey is going to be very interesting. Many people manage to get where you are now; very few manage to maintain that success; and much less keep moving ahead. What will determine your success is how well you identify the particular challenges you face and find effective ways to manage them. Get ready to maintain your success!

meal may be just what you need to put that stress behind you and reclaim your energy. The hardest part is getting up and getting started. Once you get moving, you’ll feel invigorated right away—that’s why Mother Nature invented endorphins. So don’t let a tired mind talk you out of doing what’s best for you!

3. “What’s the point? I’ve been sticking to my diet and exercise plan for months and have hardly lost anything. This isn’t working.”

Is this just the voice of frustration talking, or is this what you really believe? Weight loss is not an exact science, because we are unique individuals—physiologically, psychologically and otherwise. This means no one can give you a program that’s going to work exactly as planned, all the time. You need to take the initiative to adapt general information and proven strategies to your individual needs. You’re the only one who can decide whether you’ll let frustration stop you from reaching your goals.

Plus, regular exercise and healthy eating offer you a long list of important health benefits even when the scale isn’t changing as fast as you’d like. In 99.9 percent of cases, failure to lose weight “on schedule” does not mean you can’t reach your goal weight. It only means that you need to do some experimenting to find the right combination of strategies for you.

In summary, a true lifestyle change usually involves changing the beliefs, values and priorities that have enabled you to become overweight in the first place. Learning to monitor not only what goes in your mouth, but also what is going on in your mind and heart, are keys to making a permanent lifestyle change.

Support: Glue that Holds It All Together

This whole weight management series has really been about support—the kind we get from experts and others who have walked in our shoes, the kind we give to ourselves and the kind we give to each other. You know it’s almost impossible to lose weight permanently on your own. Research shows that people do a lot better when they participate in a program that has a social support component (online or face-to-face both work), and when they have an active support network of family and friends. So, why do it the hard way?

1. “I’m too busy,” “Putting time into this takes time away from family or work,” or “I have no choice.”

On some days skipping a workout or not sticking to your food plan really is the best choice. But this should be the exception—not the rule. If you find yourself frequently using these reasons to put off your weight-loss commitments you may be turning a manageable problem into an excuse. Consider these points:

- ▶ People who fail to take care of themselves become less able to keep up with other responsibilities. Symptoms of burnout include irritability, resentment, feeling overwhelmed or helpless, getting easily upset over small things, fatigue and an increase in minor health problems (colds, muscle aches, headaches, etc.). How is this going to help you meet your responsibilities?
- ▶ There is a big difference between authentic and unhealthy dependencies. People in families and organizations count on others to be responsible, reliable and available, but not to do what others should do for themselves. Unhealthy dependency will grow as long as you allow it. One of the best ways to avoid this is to behave as a model of good responsibility to yourself and responsibility to others.
- ▶ Everyone gets the same 24 hours in every day, and we all decide how to spend them. Sure, you need to work and make money, take care of the kids, give quality time to loved ones, manage your affairs and somehow get enough sleep to do all this again tomorrow.

It isn’t easy to squeeze in healthy meals and exercise. But it’s rarely true that you have no choice—thinking this way is a one-way ticket to someplace you don’t want to be.

- ▶ Take a look at how you spend your time. Is there really no time you could spend differently? Is it possible to make physical activity part of family time? Maybe you chill out for a couple hours in front of the TV (or chat online or on the phone), but you could fit in 20 minutes of exercise just by doing some calisthenics during the commercials, couldn’t you? Maybe the job you have right now is taking up too much of your time, and isn’t the best one for you at this point in your life. What you do every day usually comes down to a question of priorities. Where does your own health and well-being fit into your priorities?

2. “I’m just too tired,” or “I don’t have the energy to shop, cook or exercise.”

Again, this might be an accurate assessment—if a new baby keeps you up all night or if you spent the whole day moving into a new house or refinishing the living room floor. But keep in mind that there are several causes of tiredness, and a little exercise is often the best cure for many of them.

Most of us experience tiredness related to our mental or emotional states rather than actual physical exhaustion. Mental or emotional exhaustion is the product of a stressful day that may very well have been sedentary. If so, then some exercise and a healthy homemade

As you work to keep the weight off, your chances of being successful go up dramatically if you:

Check your weight (weekly). The goal here is not to panic over every small increase in your weight—it’s normal for it to fluctuate from day-to-day during maintenance just as it did during weight loss. But while you’re in the process of trying to identify your energy (calorie) needs, you’ll need to spot any upward trends in your weight before you get to the point that you need to go back to weight-loss mode. Most successful maintainers weigh in at least weekly, and start tinkering with their nutrition and workouts if they see a significant gain (or loss) for two weeks in a row.

Track your daily calorie intake—at least for a little while. It probably won’t be necessary to do this for very long, but it’s a very good idea to double check yourself for a while just to make sure you’re counting everything, estimating portions accurately, and covering all your nutrition needs—especially if you’re making substantial changes in how much you eat and/or exercise.

Make changes one at a time and in small increments. If your weight loss doesn’t stop or you start gaining weight, you’ll need to figure out the best way to change things. You won’t be able to tell what effect any particular change is having if you make a bunch of them at once, so try one thing at a time and give yourself a chance to see what works.

Maintain your social support network. People who abandon the support systems and activities they used to lose weight are much more likely to regain the weight than people who stay in contact. Helping others do what you’ve done is one of the best ways to help yourself maintain your own achievements.

Psychological Challenges: The Three P’s of Failure

Why is weight loss—especially keeping it off—so hard? Like other areas of human endeavor, we know what we need to do, and we certainly want to be successful. So what’s the problem? Why don’t we just do what we know we should?

This troubling little quirk of human nature has attracted the attention of scientists, philosophers, theologians and artists for thousands of years, and there is little reason to believe we’ll have an answer anytime soon. But what we do have right now is quite a bit of information on how those who fail often become their own worst enemies, and what successful people (in weight loss and other goals) seem to do differently.

From a psychological perspective, The Three P’s of Failure and The Three S’s of Success can help summarize this. This article (the second in the three-part series about the challenges of weight maintenance) will focus on The Three P’s of Failure. The third will discuss The Three S’s of Success.

The Three P's of Failure

Looking at the word you wouldn't notice, but there are actually three P's in "failure:" Personalized, Permanent and Pervasive. These terms refer to three elements of what psychologists call your "attributional style"—the basic, often unconscious assumptions you use when explaining to yourself why you do what you do and why you get the results you get.

In a nutshell, people who repeatedly fail at permanent weight loss tend to make three basic assumptions about the problems they encounter:

1. They assume a **personal** flaw or characteristic (weakness, incompetence, lack of will power, self-indulgence, etc.) is responsible for the problem. Often, this goes hand-in-hand with the assumption that, when they are successful it must be due to something external to them—luck, assistance or force. In other words, they personalize failure and externalize success.

Not surprisingly, people who are usually successful tend to follow the opposite pattern: they externalize failure and internalize success.

2. They assume that this personal flaw is **permanent**, some unchangeable trait they will always have to contend with, rather than something that can be rectified through education, practice, planning, support or personal growth.

Again, the most successful people tend to do the opposite. They assume that a personal shortcoming can be changed or worked around—if they put in the appropriate effort.

3. They assume that the personal, permanent flaw is also **pervasive**—that it affects all areas of their lives, not just the problem at hand. Thus, everything that goes wrong in one's life becomes an opportunity to confirm their pessimistic assumptions about themselves.

Even when things go well, these basic self-assumptions do not change (because again, success is externalized). This makes it very difficult to learn from negative experiences to make appropriate changes in behavior.

So how do you know if your attributional style might be at least partly responsible for your problems with maintaining a desirable weight? More importantly, what do you do about it?

Here are three suggestions to get you started:

1. **Observe how you talk to yourself when something goes wrong.** If you're caught up in The Three P's of Failure...
 - ▶ You probably talk to yourself in ways that you'd never dream of talking to a friend, or even someone you don't like very much. When something goes wrong, you may call yourself names, feel extremely ashamed, agitated and/or angry with yourself and become emotionally and verbally abusive towards yourself.

of your effort. If you continue to encounter the same problems or patterns—especially if this drains your motivation and confidence—consider the possibility that you're not taking enough initiative. There are lots of small things that will positively affect your initiative and self-efficacy:

- ▶ Take responsibility for your own education. If you're having problems or having trouble understanding concepts, don't ignore it. Instead, use the Weight Loss & Wellness Center website, Facebook page, support groups and message boards to pinpoint your problem and get the answers and support you need.
- ▶ Share your successes and problems with other members. Participate vicariously in the successes of others, and/or let them take part in yours. When you see that others have succeeded or overcome problems you're struggling with, it's easier to believe that you can do it too. Likewise, when your story or advice has helped someone else, your self-efficacy gets a real boost.

So use the message boards, read the success stories, start a community journal about your challenges, experiences and successes. Each time you do one of these things, you are giving yourself "mastery experience" that builds self-efficacy, and helps others at the same time.

Self-Monitoring: Moving from Diet to Lifestyle

Self-monitoring involves: accurately observing and interpreting your behavior, along with learning how to use your observations to modify your behavior and attitude. You are probably already using the nutrition and fitness trackers, which are the most basic self-monitoring tools for weight management.

At some point, most people who struggle with weight realize that there is another dimension to self-monitoring to be mastered. To put it bluntly, there is a big difference between knowing how to lose weight and keep it off, and actually doing so. To become successful, most of us need to change the basic beliefs, priorities and values that affect the eating and activity patterns we want to change. This step separates a "diet" from a lifestyle change, therefore requiring different self-monitoring techniques and tools.

Take a look at the reasons you give for not doing what you know you should—this is the easiest way to discover how your priorities and values affect your weight. Then ask yourself whether these reasons are out of your control, or whether they're excuses to avoid responsibility. We tend to be either too easy or too hard on ourselves during self-examination, so enlisting the help of a friend is beneficial.

Take a look at these common reasons dieters give for not meeting calorie and exercise goals, and follow the advice for each that will help you change your priorities:

Start by recognizing that self-efficacy comes easily and naturally to human beings. Our innate programming allows, even drives us to master developmental tasks from infancy through old age. Learning from our experiences and adjusting our behaviors accordingly is a natural process. We have to learn how to let our failures and difficulties get the best of us—that’s what “doesn’t” come naturally. How many kids do you know who let a few falls prevent them from learning to walk?

Some life experiences can make it more difficult for a person to develop a conscious and realistic sense of self-efficacy in one or more areas of adult life. This does not mean your capacity to do so is gone forever—you may just need to go out of your way to reconnect this innate ability to your weight-loss efforts. Here’s how:

- 1. Get out of your own way.** The biggest obstacle to developing a realistic sense of self-efficacy is an inability to use your own experiences (both positive and negative) to make appropriate adjustments in thought and behavior. When it comes to permanent weight loss, research indicates that persistent failure to learn from experience is most often associated with the inflexible, pessimistic and self-defeating “explanatory style.”
- 2. Know what self-efficacy is and isn’t.** Self-efficacy is not the same thing as self-esteem (feeling good about yourself), self-confidence (general faith in your abilities), or “cockeyed optimism” (a matter of persuading yourself that all things are possible if you work hard).

These traits won’t help you develop self-efficacy or substitute for it.

Self-efficacy is very task-specific. It’s about believing that you can do particular things necessary to accomplish a specific goal, such as permanent weight loss. You can have both high and low senses of self-efficacy in different areas, such as parenting or career, but this will not automatically transfer to the domain of weight loss.

You build self-efficacy for permanent weight loss gradually, as you successfully move through a process of breaking down your ultimate weight-loss goal into positive, specific and realistic short-term goals. Then you identify and master daily behaviors, techniques and attitudes that will allow you to achieve these goals. With each successful step down this path, you prove to yourself that you CAN transform your lifestyle into one that is consistent with maintaining a healthy weight.

- 3. Take the initiative.** The process above should sound vaguely familiar—essentially it’s the one SparkPeople uses to help you create lifestyle changes. So, you don’t need to reinvent the wheel to improve your self-efficacy and your chances for long-term weight management.

But understand that simply “following instructions” does not help build self-efficacy. You have to take initiative: identify your own strengths, weaknesses and needs; tailor your program to suit your individual needs; and regularly take a reasonable, non-judgmental look at the quality

- ▶ You don’t spend much time or effort thinking through what’s happened in an objective way, rather you just jump straight to the conclusion: “This happened because there is something seriously wrong with me that isn’t going to change, and I am doomed to fail forever.”
- ▶ Emotionally, you can go from disappointment to despair and hopelessness in a few seconds, usually over something that’s pretty trivial in the grand scheme of things—a bowl of ice cream or a missed exercise session. The end result is that you rarely learn anything from your own experience, and this pattern just keeps repeating itself, with no progress towards changing the unwanted behavior.

Part of this process is unconscious, and if you’ve been doing this for a while (and gotten pretty good at it) it happens so fast that it doesn’t seem like there are any steps or stages to it. But, in order to intervene and stop this process, you need a rough idea of how it works:

- ▶ Something happens (you gain a pound or two, skip an exercise session or eat something you wanted to avoid, etc.) and you feel a “normal” level of anxiety, guilt or disappointment—the feeling that motivates us to try again.
- ▶ You start thinking about why this happened and unconscious assumption number one kicks in, causing you to leap to the conclusion there is something wrong with you, without benefit of doubt or investigation—you just “know” it’s true.
- ▶ Now you feel a little worse (mild shame, self-blame, etc.), so you start thinking about how to deal with this problem, and assumption number two kicks in: You “realize” that you’re always going to have this problem, it’s just the way you are.
- ▶ Your feelings escalate to desperation, frustration and helplessness. This is getting very unpleasant, so you try once more to think your way out of the mess. But now assumption number three kicks in, and you’re forced to admit that you’re really a pretty poor excuse for a human being, and that’s not going to change.
- ▶ Your feelings are in high gear—self-hatred and hopelessness on top of everything else—and more thinking isn’t going to help. You have to do something to make these feelings go away.
- ▶ If you have learned some basic skills in emotional self-management, maybe you’ll just blow off your diet for the rest of the day (or week), or go on a short-term binge. Some people do much worse to themselves.
- ▶ Once the storm is over, you’ll reconfirm what you concluded about yourself—that there is something wrong with you that you can’t control or manage.

This process will continue until you begin thinking about your unconscious assumptions and the effect they have on you.

2. Interrupt your self-talk process before it turns into a full-blown storm. The good news is that you can effectively interrupt this cycle at any point along the way— the earlier the better. Unless you are perfect, you'll occasionally do something you'll wish you hadn't. It isn't good to avoid normal feelings of anxiety, guilt and disappointment— these feelings motivate us.

So, the first place you can reasonably intervene is when you first start thinking about what has gone wrong. The best possible intervention at this stage is to not think about it at all. Simply acknowledge what you did, how you feel about it (“I just ate three helpings of lasagna, and I really feel like a jerk right now.”) and move on without letting your assumptions have their way with you.

If you continue to feel bad, distract yourself. Focus on something else completely unrelated. Practice this until you're pretty confident that you can successfully intervene whenever you want to. Until you reach that point, don't waste time or effort trying to challenge your assumptions directly—they'll win every time until you've mastered the art of intervening in your own process.

Intervention will probably feel a little uncomfortable, unnatural and even scary at first. It'll be both tempting and easy to “fail” at this, too, because that's what you expect. But this is do-able, and well worth any temporary discomfort you may feel.

3. Practice positive self-talk and affirmations. To accomplish the ultimate goal (replacing unhelpful assumptions with ones that help you reach a goal), you need to be comfortable with thinking, saying and hearing positive statements about yourself. For most people who struggle with The Three P's of Failure, this is harder and more unpleasant than anyone might expect. We do want to hear good things said about ourselves, don't we? Not if it contradicts our basic assumptions about ourselves! So, once again, be forewarned. You may experience some discomfort, like a mix of free-floating anxiety and guilt. Take this as an indication you are on the right track.

Begin with some simple daily affirmations and positive self-talk when things are going well. Acknowledge when you've done well, and take appropriate credit for what you've accomplished—don't pass it off as a fluke, or tell yourself you couldn't have done it without someone else's help. You may have had help, and it's fine to thank the people who helped you, but recognize that you are the one who succeeded. Keep a list of these small and large accomplishments; read and update it every day. Recognize the skills and positive characteristics that enabled you to succeed, and write them down.

Start with the basics:

- ▶ I am a good person, and I deserve respect.
- ▶ I choose to respect myself today by refusing to engage in verbal or emotional self-abuse.
- ▶ I have been successful at many things I have set out to do, and I can learn to do better at the things that give me problems.

There are dozens of books and lists of affirmations available, which you can draw on if you have trouble thinking up your own, including several threads on the SparkPeople Message Boards.

When it comes to choosing the particular messages you want to include in your positive self-talk and affirmations, there is one simple guideline: If you have an emotional reaction to it (positive or negative), or if you find yourself responding to it with disbelief or scorn, it's probably just what you need to be telling yourself every day.

If you work on these three steps diligently, they will become an automatic part of your daily routine. From there, it won't take long to prepare yourself for the next step: replacing The Three P's of Failure with The Three S's of Success!

The Three S's of Success

What leads to success at weight loss and long-term weight management? According to research, the psychological component of the puzzle involves three things: self-efficacy, self-monitoring and support—the Three S's of Success. Let's take a look at what these three concepts look like in real life, and how you can make them part of your own weight management toolkit.

Self-Efficacy: The Crucial Ingredient

Self-efficacy is the belief that you can do what is required of you to achieve an objective. Self-efficacy is to successful weight management as the best start in a 200-yard dash is to winning the race—without it, you're in big trouble. If you lack self-efficacy, you might not be able (or willing) to put in the sustained effort required to lose weight and keep it off permanently. But when you do have self-efficacy, you'll be able to view the little setbacks and bad days as interesting challenges to overcome. And more importantly, you'll be able to transform these experiences into opportunities to learn more about yourself and become increasingly more skillful—instead of watching helplessly as problems erode your motivation to continue.

For now, we'll assume that your sense of self-efficacy regarding permanent weight loss is not very high. Maybe you've lost and regained weight so many times that you can't honestly tell yourself you can keep it off and really believe it. Maybe you have a tendency to begin diets with high expectations and great intentions, hoping for that magic ingredient, but give up quickly when you realize it isn't going to be as easy as you thought. Or maybe you have one particular habit—like emotional eating or lack of exercise—you haven't been able to get a handle on, no matter what you've tried. What can you do now to increase your sense of self-efficacy, and move past these problems?