

## Maintaining Your Weight Loss

Achieving your weight loss goal is a great feeling. But it can be sobering to hear that only between 5 and 10 percent of people who lose weight successfully keep it off.

The good news is that it is possible to maintain weight loss by remaining focused on the healthy lifestyle that helped you reach your goal in the first place. It helps to know about the biological and psychological factors that cause some people to regain weight—as well as help others keep it off for good. This booklet will help you work through these factors and make a weight maintenance plan that's right for you.

---

### Biological Factors

When you are in maintenance, you will need to make changes to your diet and exercise so that you are achieving energy balance instead of a calorie deficit. This is the main difference between weight maintenance and weight loss. All the other principles you have adapted to get where you are will remain the same.

Unfortunately, even lifestyle changes like a healthy diet and regular exercise don't guarantee you won't regain weight. That's because your body may have a "set point" at which it feels you've lost too much weight and it's time to regain.

Many experts believe that everyone has a natural weight that our bodies will try to maintain—the set point. A large weight gain can increase your set point, but losing weight doesn't automatically lower it. If you are a person who has struggled with weight for many years, or have gained and lost weight repeatedly, it may require more work to lower your set point.

Researchers point to several strategies that can help you overcome set point challenges:

- **Find out how many calories you need each day.** The Memorial Wellness Center team can help you determine how many calories you should consume every day to maintain your current weight. This calculation is based on your current weight and your activity level.
- **Make gradual changes to your calorie intake.** If you are currently eating fewer calories than your maintenance level, increase your intake gradually by 150 to 200 calories a day for one week. If you continue to lose weight, repeat this gradual increase, or stop if your weight holds steady. Continue to repeat until you either reach your estimated maintenance target or you start gaining weight.
- **Keep exercising.** If you stop exercising, your body will start storing energy as fat. You may need to exercise harder or longer during the maintenance phase than you did during your initial weight loss phase. Many people who are successful at weight maintenance burn 150-200 more calories per day. However, do not reduce your calorie intake below the maintenance level to avoid doing exercise. This will not help lower your set point weight.

## Fat-Preservation Mode

Research tells us that our bodies prioritize preserving fat after a major weight loss. In fact, studies have found that when lab rats that lose large amounts of weight due to a restricted diet are allowed to return to their previous diet, their bodies react differently during rest and exercise. Normally, fat provides energy during rest or light activity, while glucose is used as fuel for moderate and high levels of activity. But the rats that had previously lost weight used glucose during rest and light activity and did not burn as much fat.

Here are some ways to keep your body out of “fat-preservation mode.”

- **Prioritize protein.** You may crave carbohydrates at times when your body is trying to conserve fat. Aim for a diet with about 30 percent of your total calories from protein, carbs at 50 percent and fat at 20 percent. Eat high-protein, low-glycemic foods like beans, nuts and whole grains.
- **Get enough sleep and reduce stress.** Stress and poor sleeping habits can make your body more determined to conserve fat.

## General Weight Maintenance Tips

- **Keep track of your weight on a weekly basis.** Weight will fluctuate from day to day during your maintenance phase, just like it did when you were losing weight. The important thing is to check in weekly so you can notice any long-term trends.
- **Keep track of your daily calorie intake.** By now, you probably have a good idea of your nutrition needs and portion sizes. But continue tracking calories for a little while to make sure you’re accounting accurately for what you eat, especially if you are making changes to your diet or exercise.
- **Make incremental changes.** Don’t change too much about your diet or exercise at once. Making changes one at a time will help you monitor how it affects your weight.
- **Keep your social support systems strong.** Maintain the relationships that helped you lose weight and provided accountability—and support and encourage others on the same journey.

---

## Psychological Factors

Why are some people successful at maintaining weight loss, while others struggle? The answer often lies in psychological factors.

In an article published on SparkPeople.com, psychologist Dean Anderson—who successfully maintained his own significant weight loss—suggests that people who fail at maintaining weight loss are often held back by what he called “the Three P’s of Failure:”

- 1 They assume the problem is caused by a **personal** flaw, like weakness or lack of willpower, and that other people’s success comes from luck. In other words, they believe failure is caused by something within themselves while success is caused by external factors.
- 2 They assume that this flaw is **permanent**. They believe that they cannot change their own shortcomings, even with new habits, hard work or determination.
- 3 They assume that the flaw affects all aspects of their lives, not just the problem at hand. They struggle to change their **pessimistic** assumptions about themselves, even when things are going well.

Anderson suggests the following strategies to change these destructive assumptions:

- **Notice how you talk to yourself.** If you experience a setback in your weight loss, miss a workout or eat something that doesn’t fit into your diet plan, do you call yourself names or “beat yourself up?” Are you harder on yourself than you would be on another person? Do you jump straight to the conclusion that you are a failure?
- **Interfere in this process before it gets out of hand.** Negative self-talk can set off a cycle of guilt, shame, disappointment and self-blame that can cause you to abandon your healthy habits. Do not avoid these feelings. Acknowledge what has gone wrong and your emotions surrounding this setback. If you continue to struggle to move on, distract yourself with other activities.

- **Talk to yourself positively.** Get in the habit of thinking and talking positively about yourself. Repeat positive affirmations daily. Think about all you've accomplished and acknowledge that your success is due to your hard work and commitment. Make a list of everything you're proud of.

If false assumptions about ourselves lead to failure, what attributes lead to success? Anderson attributes success to Three S's: self-efficacy, self-monitoring and support.

**Self-efficacy** refers to the level of confidence that people have in themselves and their abilities. People with high self-efficacy see setbacks as challenges to be overcome and are not overwhelmed when problems arise.

Young children are great at self-efficacy. They work hard to master new skills and when they fall, they get back up quickly. But life experiences can erode self-efficacy in adults. You can practice improving your self-efficacy by focusing on opportunities to learn. If you are inflexible and pessimistic, learning is difficult. Keep your mind open and remember situations when you learned and adapted.

You can become better at self-efficacy by taking initiative. Identify your own strengths, weaknesses and needs; tailor your program to suit those needs; and regularly evaluate your effort in a reasonable, nonjudgmental manner. When you continue to encounter the same problems or patterns, especially if they drain your motivation and confidence, consider that you might not be taking enough initiative. The following are some small things that will positively affect your initiative and self-efficacy:

- **Education is your responsibility.** When you encounter problems or have difficulty understanding concepts, don't ignore them. Instead, use the Wellness Center website, Facebook page, appointment and support groups to pinpoint your problem and get the answers and support you need.
- **Be open to sharing your successes and problems.** Take part in others' successes as vicariously as you can, and/or allow them to share in yours. When you see others succeed or overcome problems you're facing, it's easier to believe you can as well. When your story or advice has helped someone else, your self-efficacy increases. Doing these things gives you "mastery experience" that builds self-efficacy and helps others as well.

**Self-monitoring** involves accurately observing and interpreting your behavior, as well as learning how to use that information to modify your attitude. People trying to lose weight often use nutrition and exercise trackers or journaling for self-monitoring.

Self-monitoring shouldn't stop when you reach your weight loss goal. This is the time to change your "diet" into a lifestyle. Consider how you can keep yourself on track at times when it's easy to make excuses like "I'm too busy," or "I'm too tired." This may mean allowing yourself the time to prioritize healthy habits and self-care. Notice when you are drifting from your nutrition and exercise plans—and, more importantly, take the time to consider why.

**Support** means continuing to lean on the people who have helped you achieve your weight loss goals. Your Memorial Wellness Center team is here to help you during weight maintenance just as we were during your initial weight loss. Keep your relationships with your care team, family and friends strong, and ask them to hold you accountable.

---

## Practice and Patience

People often feel guilty after a minor lapse from their weight maintenance plan—and that guilt can lead to more lapses, and sometimes to abandoning the plan completely.

It's important to realize that maintaining a healthy weight is an ongoing process that requires us to accept lapses and move on rather than letting them snowball. There are two ways to break this cycle: preventing lapses from occurring and knowing how to respond in a constructive way when (not if) they do occur.

Changing behavior is hard, and forming new habits requires years of practice and patience. Acknowledge everything you've achieved and recognize that it's due to your own hard work, not luck or assistance from others. Empower yourself to move on from minor lapses, and know that they don't define your journey.

## Re-Evaluating Goals

One way to maintain momentum for a healthy lifestyle is to set new goals once you've reached the old ones. Now that you've met your weight loss goal, it's time to set new maintenance goals.

- **Gain new skills.** Is there a new sport or activity that could help you maintain your weight? For example, if you enjoy cycling or running, consider entering a race. You might challenge yourself with every race to increase your distance or even your time. Your sense of accomplishment will help you to stay focused.
- **Pay attention to the numbers.** In maintenance these numbers help to keep you on track. They might include body measurements or clothing size, endurance, health metrics like blood pressure or cholesterol level or even your general feeling of wellness.
- **Be realistic about your expectations.** You might have lost weight by recording every bite and calorie you consumed, but it might be more difficult after you enter the maintenance phase. For some people, logging helps hold them accountable. However, some people would prefer a little more freedom. Knowing what works best for you is essential.
- **Share what you've learned.** It is easier to stay focused on being healthier when you are helping someone else do the same. Support others who are seeking to make healthy changes, whether it's a close friend or someone you met in an online community.
- **Write about your experiences.** Track your progress in a journal or letter to yourself. Record the health challenges you were facing when your journey began, and how they've improved over time. Note activities you can do now that you couldn't before. This will help you remember what you've accomplished.

---

## In conclusion...

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 unable to do.

Maintaining these changes is different. Successful maintenance requires a change in mindset and a new way of marking success. It also comes with its own set of challenges. The Memorial 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 a while. It is true that once new healthy choices become established, 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 into unhealthy patterns. That's where support comes in.

Staying involved in the Wellness 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. 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 into the center to work with our providers if you find yourself slipping back into old habits or if you just need some new ideas.

Maintaining the results you have achieved isn't easy, but it is worth it. We are so glad you have chosen us to accompany you on your journey.