12 Healthy Ways to Lose Weight for Good

You're 10, 20, 30 or more pounds overweight and you've dieted, on and off, for years. You've lost weight and then put it back on, and more. Why? Diets don't work. Today we know diets don't work. Restricting calories again and again alters your metabolism. That's why so many people put back the weight they lost while dieting, plus more.

Yet, desperate to lose weight, Americans keep going on diets. While there's no magic bullet for weight loss, there are steps you can take to lose weight, safely and for good, while increasing your health.

The common sense advice to "eat less, move more," isn't entirely correct. It matters *what* you eat.

And here's a dirty little secret: Consuming refined carbohydrates — simple sugars and starches — is one of the biggest reasons Americans are now battling obesity. Carbohydrates you don't burn get stored in your body as fat.

Since food manufacturers began lining supermarket shelves with "no-fat" and "low-fat" foods — most of which have added sugars — we have become fatter than ever.

This list of healthy eating habits is by no means complete. But here are 12 recommendations in to help you lose weight and gain the benefits — more energy and a fitter, healthier you.

1. Eat a *healthy* breakfast every morning. Eating breakfast revs up your metabolism. If you skip breakfast you're likely to eat more calories by binging later in the day. In a study of people who lost weight and kept it off for more than five years, one major thing they all did was eat breakfast. But Pop-tarts, donuts and Hot Pockets don't cut it. Cooked oatmeal, whole grain cereals, whole grain breads, eggs and tofu with a salad are all healthy choices.

2. Stop counting calories and eat foods that nourish your body. A meal of fat-free, sugar-free, refined processed foods is also nutrient-free. Plus, it won't satisfy you for long compared to a meal of nutrient-dense whole foods like vegetables, lean meats, whole grains, and healthy fat. As you begin eating more nutritious foods and get a little more physical activity (if you aren't physically active now), your body will come to its natural healthy weight.

3. Always have some veggies and fruit washed and cut in your fridge. This way they're easy to grab when you're hungry (instead of reaching for that giant-size bag of potato chips) and you can throw them in your bag when you're on the go.

4. Replace diet soda with unsweetened beverages. Diet drinks keep your sweet tooth craving sweets. People who drink diet drinks actually reward themselves with extra calories through the day. Instead, drink iced teas or plain or carbonated water with a slice of lemon or lime.

5. Use the "Plate Method" to make a healthy meal. Fill half your plate with low or non-starchy veggies like broccoli, asparagus, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, string beans, mushrooms, peppers, or leafy greens and some fruit. Fill one quarter, with a whole grain like brown rice, barley, bulgur, or quinoa, or a starchy vegetable like corn or potatoes, or beans. Fill the last quarter with protein like broiled, sauteed, roasted, or baked (not fried) fish, chicken or turkey without the skin, lean cuts of meat, tofu or eggs.

6. Cut down on carbs. Refined carbohydrates (cake, candy, cookies, muffins, scones, cupcakes, soda, fruit juice, syrups, chips, and most supermarket breads) you don't burn turn into fat. Even foods like fruit yogurt and many breakfast cereals have lots of added sugar. Replace fruity yogurts with Greek plain yogurt, choose high-fiber, lower carb cereal and add small amounts of healthy fat to your meals with avocado slices, unsalted nuts, seeds and olive oil.

7. Shrink your lunch and dinner plates. If you and your family eat off a plate larger than ten inches, replace them with plates that are nine or ten inches in diameter. We tend to eat what's in front of us. Using smaller plates there's less food in front of you to eat.

8. Enjoy less healthy foods now and then, in small portions, unless there's a medical reason not to do so. Not letting yourself eat something you love may make you feel deprived and frustrated and subvert your efforts to eat well.

9. When eating out, ask your server to double the green veggies in place of the potato or rice. I always do this and benefit from more nutrition and less carbs. Also, share food at the table. My husband and I always share an appetizer and when with a group, if someone orders dessert, it comes with a spoon for everyone.

10. Keep tempting foods out of the house. Stock your fridge and pantry with healthy foods and you're creating an environment that will help make you successful. Enjoy treats occasionally when you're out.

11. Enlist family members and friends to eat healthier with you. It's easier when it's a team effort, and your family will also reap the health benefits along with you.

12. Talk positively to yourself and quiet your inner critic. Notice during the day your positive efforts and compliment yourself. "I chose a healthy vegetable plate instead of a slice of pizza. Great job!" The more you pat yourself on the back for what you're doing well, the more energy you'll have to keep doing it. If you notice you're telling yourself you'll never succeed, or beating yourself up for having two bowls of ice cream, stop! To quiet your inner critic head out for a brief walk, turn on some music and sway, and above all, tell yourself tomorrow is a new day and a new start.