



Keys to Permanent Weight Loss

Successful Losers Keep the Weight Off

At any given time, nearly 60 percent of Americans are actively trying to lose weight. It is no surprise that a myriad of weight loss products, diet books and gadgets flood the marketplace. Although many people succeed at losing weight, few manage to keep the weight off for the long haul. Those who have are referred to as "successful losers" and research studies on these individuals reveal the keys to permanent weight loss.

The National Weight Control Registry (NWCR) is the largest ongoing study on long-term weight loss. To be included in the study, you must have lost at least 30 pounds and kept the weight off for at least one year. On average, the 5,000 participants have lost 60 pounds and maintained the weight loss for nearly six years. The range of weight loss is 30 to 300 pounds, which means any weight loss goal is possible. Interestingly, the odds appear stacked against these individuals as nearly half were overweight or obese as kids and three-quarters have at least one obese parent. So, if you think you're doomed because of your genetics, here is clear evidence to the contrary. You are NOT destined to be overweight for life and you CAN overcome it by changing certain behaviors.

Here are the habits successful losers adopted to drop those unwanted pounds:

- Eat breakfast daily
- Exercise approximately 60 minutes a day
- Check weight at least once a week
- Watch less than 10 hours of television per week
- Maintain a consistent diet on weekends and weekdays
- Track food intake

Eating breakfast every day helps manage hunger and may prevent over-eating and poor food choices later in the day. When we get extremely hungry, the tendency is to select foods we wouldn't normally eat.

Daily exercise boosts your calorie burn which helps balance out the calories you take in. Remember, the definition of a stable weight is when the calories you consume equals the calories you expend. This doesn't mean you have to do exercise you don't enjoy. Most successful losers walk as their primary exercise.

Checking your weight regularly helps you stay in tune with your body and allows you to adjust your intake or activity if your weight creeps up. In fact, 44 percent of successful losers weigh themselves every day, and most check at least once a week.

Limiting TV time has a twofold effect - you're less likely to snack mindlessly and you're probably up burning more calories than you would be sitting in front of the tube.

Eating consistently each day of the week, including weekends, helps prevent you from eating more than you need, which over time leads to weight gain. Participants who had a consistent diet were one and a half times more likely to maintain their weight within five pounds compared to those who didn't.² This is probably because a weekend of over-indulging can wipe out an entire week of progress.

Finally, **tracking what you eat** keeps you aware of what and how much you eat. This is especially important in weight control since most of us underestimate by at least 20-30 percent.

Other research has confirmed the findings of the NWCR and identified additional behaviors of sustained

weight loss:

- Plan meals on most days of the week
- Track fat and calories
- Measure food
- Add physical activity into daily routine
- Set goals

It's important to note that all of these behaviors are not required to achieve success, but they are habits that have been shown to be effective. It is certainly possible to reach and maintain your goal by simply eating less, moving more and adjusting based on whether the scale goes up or down.

Another essential component of long-term weight loss is social support.⁵ Whether it's a friend, coach, health professional or online community, it's important to have someone who will listen and give feedback. Online weight control programs have become popular because of convenience and the community support they offer. However, the most effective online programs provide structure, ongoing personalized feedback and support.⁶

Why do most people gain the weight back?

In a nutshell, people return to their original weight (and more) when they stop doing what made them successful in the first place. Participants of the NWCR who regained more than five pounds reported exercising less, eating more fatty foods and allowing themselves to overeat more frequently.² It makes perfect sense why the majority of those who go on "fad" diets and other programs lose weight quickly and eventually gain it back. They simply cannot maintain the drastic changes most fad diets require. It's not that fad diets don't work; the problem is they only work on a short term basis. Keeping the weight off is the real challenge.

Do what works for YOU

Weight loss can be achieved in many different ways as long as you consistently burn more calories than you consume. However, to achieve and sustain results, follow the example of successful losers who selected behaviors they could maintain for life. Keep in mind that you can start by making small changes such as taking 10 minute walks, skipping your afternoon soda or increasing your daily steps. You may not drop the pounds as fast as you'd like, but when it comes to weight loss- it's not how you start that counts, it's how you finish. Do what works for you for the long haul and YOU will ultimately become a successful loser.

References

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