

Stop WORRYING About Your WEIGHT

Forget the number on the scale. There is no perfect weight. Work on getting fit and healthy, starting with your attitude



No wonder they call America the land of plenty.

We've got plenty of high-calorie, fat-laden foods—triple-decker burgers, super-size fries, pizza with everything on it. Plenty of machines that move so we don't have to—cars, escalators, elevators. Plenty of reasons not to get out of our seats—why bother when we have access to countless TV channels, and the internet, with a click of the remote? And we've got plenty of overweight, out-of-shape people, too.

According to national surveys, 31 percent of us are obese. That's roughly 59 million people who are 30 or more

pounds overweight. The average American puts on two pounds a year. "If we keep up this behavior, by 2008, four out of ten adults in the United States will be obese," warns James O. Hill, Ph.D., director of the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.

But it's not really about the pounds—they're just the symptom. It's about lifestyle and attitude. And to fix the problem, we're going to have to change the way we live more than how we eat.

"It's all about baby steps," says *Good Morning America* fitness expert Jim Karas, author of *Flip the Switch* and *The Business Plan for the Body*. "You shouldn't wake up one day and try to overhaul everything in your life. That's a recipe for failure. Instead, for one week, try to incorporate two or three healthy changes into your lifestyle. At the end of that week, you'll start to see and feel a difference in both your body and mind." If you're up to the challenge—and your doctor gives you the okay—choose at least one tip from each section below. Then put them into action.

The Body

⚡ NEVER GO FOR THE QUICK FIX.

Steer clear of programs that promise instant results like "lose 10 pounds in 10 days." Crash diets wreak havoc on your body, and you'll only end up putting the weight back on. Think long-term. Changing your lifestyle takes time, patience and commitment.

⚡ DON'T EAT IN FRONT OF THE TV.

When you're watching TV, "your brain

is somewhere else and you don't notice you're full," says Mara Z. Vitolins, Dr. P.H., assistant professor of public health sciences at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center. Think about what you're eating, and chew it slowly. You'll eat less because you're paying attention and giving your body time to feel full.

⚡ KEEP A FOOD JOURNAL FOR A DAY.

Write down everything you eat and drink within a 24-hour period. The journal will help you "zero in on where you're going wrong with your diet," Vitolins says. "Because you have to write everything down, you'll think twice about those little snacks."

⚡ NEVER SKIP A MEAL. It puts your body into starvation mode and disrupts your metabolism.

⚡ DRESSING ON THE SIDE, PLEASE.

Fifteen percent of the average American woman's daily calories come from salad dressing. An 80-calorie salad can become an 800-calorie blowout, Karas points out. "You'd be better off eating a steak." Choose a low-cal, low-fat dressing, and use it sparingly.

Want to live longer?

Those extra pounds are shaving years off our lives. Being overweight increases our risk for four of the leading causes of death in the U.S.—heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes. "A young obese white man may expect to lose thirteen years of life; a young obese white woman, eight years; and a young, severely obese black individual may expect to lose as many as twenty years of life," reports David B. Allison, Ph.D., professor of public health at the University of Alabama. (The reasons for the race and gender differences are still not fully understood.)



Drink more water.

Your body needs water to metabolize fat. Most of us aren't getting enough. Americans drink more soda—56 gallons a year—than coffee and tap water combined. (Soft drinks are the single biggest source of added sugar in our diet.) Put down those high-caloric, sweetened beverages—non-diet sodas, juice and sports drinks—and pick up a glass of water instead. Another thing to keep in mind: Because it's hard to tell the difference between being thirsty and being hungry, we often end up overeating.



👉 **EAT COLORFULLY.** Perk up your plate with fruits and vegetables. “The brighter and darker the food, the richer the vitamins and nutrients,” says Vitolins.

👉 **GO FROZEN.** Frozen fruits and vegetables have as many vitamins and nutrients as fresh ones. “In fact, they sometimes have more, if the fresh ones have been sitting around,” says Karas. Stay away from canned veggies and fruits, which are loaded with sodium and preservatives.

👉 **A LITTLE PROTEIN GOES A LONG WAY.** Meat, fish, tofu, beans. “Protein is the hardest food to digest,” says Vitolins. “It stays with you the longest

and makes you feel full.” Have a little with every meal.

👉 **CLEAN OUT THE CABINETS.** Get rid of foods that might trigger a binge. If they're out of sight, they'll be out of mind—and reach.

👉 **GET HALF TO GO.** At a restaurant, ask for a to-go box. When your food comes, put half in the box to take home. In the U.S., “portion size is out of control,” says Vitolins. “Half of what a restaurant gives is about right.”

👉 **FACE THE FAST FOOD FACTS.** “Fast food doesn't have to be two four-letter words,” says Karas. “Just order smart.” A regular hamburger or cheeseburger is only about 300 calories. It's the Big Macs, huge sodas and jumbo fries that get us in trouble.

Think healthy.

Use positive thoughts to affirm your new lifestyle. Remind yourself: “I feel good today. If I stick with it, I'll feel even better tomorrow.” “I will honor the body God gave me.” “I want to change my life. And I have the power to do it.”

The Mind

👉 **VISUALIZE YOURSELF IN SHAPE.** Retrain your mind along with your body. Picture yourself healthy, strong and fit. That way you'll have a mental image for motivation.

👉 GO TO BED FIVE MINUTES EARLIER.

Research at the University of Chicago showed people's metabolism dropped 40 percent when they didn't get enough sleep. "The better rested you are, the better food choices you'll make," says Karas. "The five minutes will start a positive trend."

👉 FIND A FITNESS BUDDY. An Indiana University study found that couples who worked out separately had a 50 percent dropout rate after a year. Couples who went to the gym together had only a 10 percent dropout rate.

👉 STAY OFF THE SCALE. Your body weight has natural daily fluctuations. Why drive yourself crazy trying to keep up with them? Don't weigh yourself more than once a week, if at all.

👉 SET REALISTIC GOALS. It takes time to break the bad habits we're used to, then more time to get reconditioned to the good habits. Don't give up if you don't see results right away.

Exercise

👉 WORK OUT IN FIVE-MINUTE INTERVALS. Take the stairs, not the elevator. Get off the bus two stops earlier. Park farther away and walk. Put away the remote control, and get up and change the channel. There's time in everyone's day for exercise. Look for it.

👉 FIND AN EXERCISE YOU LOVE. "If your job is loud and stressful," says Karas, "a workout with pumping music may not be right for you. A mellow yoga class might be better." Choose an exercise that fits the kind of movement (walking, dancing, swimming, stretching) and environment (indoors/outdoors, music-filled/quiet, with a group/by yourself) you prefer.

👉 GO FOR A "WALK DATE" INSTEAD OF A "LUNCH DATE." Every social event in our culture revolves around food—let's meet for coffee, lunch, a drink. Meet a friend for some physical activity instead. *

Resistance is the key.

A University of Maryland study showed that a person's resting metabolic rate increased by about seven percent after six months of intensive weight-training. "Strength training is critical for people with a weight control problem," says Miriam Nelson, director of the Center for Physical Fitness at Tufts University and coauthor of *Strong Women Stay Slim*. "Most people who weight-train lose fat as they gain muscle and often drop down a size or two. A pound of muscle is about thirty percent smaller than a pound of fat." Personal trainer Jim Karas suggests devoting at least three hours a week to exercise—75 percent to resistance training and 25 percent to cardiovascular exercise.

