

How to make healthy habits stick

We are creatures of habit, and tend to get comfortable doing things the same way each and every day. Unfortunately, not all of our habits are healthy. Discover how to make healthy habits stick for good to help meet your lifestyle and weight loss goals.

Avoid the quick fix

If you're looking to lose weight, there are many products and diet plans out there that promise quick results. Often they include the purchase of diet shakes, pills or a strict eating plan.

Sometimes they do work in the short term, but often they fail and weight is regained as these methods don't address the cause of why unhealthy behaviours are taking place.

Losing weight takes planning, commitment and time. As a rule of thumb, if a method promises weight loss that seems extremely fast, it's probably not a good idea.



Small changes are sustainable changes

If you want to change your eating habits, begin by focusing on one aspect of your diet and ways to make this healthier. Once this becomes habit, focus on another small goal.

Some examples might be:

- Including more vegetables at dinner
- Choosing healthier breakfast options
- Addressing night-time snacking behaviour
- Bringing lunch from home on workdays
- Increasing water intake

This slower approach is effective because it allows you to build the changes into your lifestyle. Meeting these short term goals is motivating to keep going.

Reward yourself

Find ways to reward yourself for meeting your goals. Rewards that don't involve food are best so take some time to think what you would find fulfilling. Some ideas to get you started include:

- Going see a new movie
- Bringing home a bunch of flowers or a new plant
- A trip to the beach
- Getting a manicure/pedicure
- Home spa day
- Visiting the library or bookstore for new reading material

Set goals for success

Take time to **develop goals** for your weight loss journey. This step is often the difference between people who succeed and those that don't. Realistic, well-planned weight-loss goals keep you focused and motivated. They provide a plan for change as you move toward to a healthier lifestyle.

A good outline for setting goals is the **SMART Goal** framework.

SMART is an acronym for:

Specific – a good goal includes specific details. For example a goal to *'exercise more'* is not specific. A specific goal looks at what, how and when - *'I will walk for 30 minutes in my lunchbreak'*.

Measurable - If you can measure a goal, then you can determine how successful you are at meeting the goal. Building on the goal above, *'I will walk for 30 minutes in my lunchbreak, 3 times a week'* is now measurable.

Attainable – All goals should be challenging but they shouldn't be so difficult that they're overwhelming. A goal to run a half marathon when you have only just gotten back into light exercise may be too great initially.

Relevant - Define how the goal is relevant in your life and remind yourself of these reasons when you are tempted to quit.

Timeframe – Each goal should have a time limit. So decide on a reasonable amount of time that you'll take to reach your goal. Then this gives you an opportunity to revise the goal and keep building on your progress.

SMART Goal Example

I want to lose 5kg [*specific, measurable, relevant*] in 6 months [*timeframe, attainable*] by exercising 3 times a week for at least 30 minutes [*specific, measurable*], and by cutting soft drink intake from one can daily to one can weekly [*specific, measurable*].



There will be set backs – it's how you deal with them that matters

An all or nothing mindset can be damaging to weight loss goals. Let's say you have had a stressful week and turn to an unhealthy food for comfort. This can lead to feelings of guilt and cause a cycle of overeating. You may begin thinking "*what's the point*" and be tempting to give up making healthy changes.

Instead, don't be too hard on yourself. Recognise that the next meal or day is an opportunity to get back on track, nourish your body with nutritious foods and move more.

Record your SMART Goal