

Eat right & LOSE WEIGHT WELL

Fast weight-loss diets can leave you miserable and heavier than before. Here, Good Housekeeping's nutritionist, Anita Bean, reveals the real secrets to safe and lasting weight loss

Did you put on a few pounds during the lockdowns and are now finding them hard to shift? Well, you're certainly not alone. According to an Ipsos MORI survey commissioned by King's College London, almost half of respondents said they had put on weight in the past year. That's hardly surprising given our increased reliance on comfort foods, but it also means many of us are now struggling to fit into our jeans.

Tempting as a fast weight-loss diet may be, drastic calorie reduction is likely to leave you miserable and regaining those same pounds. 'Much of the weight lost from crash diets is fluid, but you're also at risk of losing muscle as your body tries to maintain blood-sugar levels by converting protein into glucose,' explains registered dietitian Ro Huntriss. 'Couple this with increased hunger and fatigue and a slow-down in your metabolic rate as your body tries to preserve its energy stores, and you'll almost certainly regain weight.'

Instead, the smart move is to focus on these science-backed ways to help you lose unwanted pounds safely and keep you feeling good.

Reach a CALORIE DEFICIT

You need to be in a calorie deficit to lose weight, which means consuming slightly fewer calories than you're burning. The NHS advises reducing your current intake by 500cals a day, but this doesn't take your age, weight, height and activity level into account. For an accurate assessment, try the National Institute of Health's Body Weight Planner at niddk.nih.gov/bwp. Once you've popped in your details, it will tell you how many calories you need to maintain your current weight, how much to reach your goal weight and how much to maintain your goal weight. The NHS advise a safe rate for weight loss being 1lb to 2lb a week.

“To lose weight, you need to be in a calorie deficit”

CARB MATCH to your daily activity

You definitely need carbs for your brain and for energy, but if you are sitting down all day and not burning them off through activity, you'll store them as fat. That doesn't mean embarking on a low-carb diet; instead, simply swap half your usual portion of carbs (bread, potatoes or pasta) for extra vegetables on days when you are not physically active. Also choose

lower-carb meals, such as Tandoori Salmon Kebabs, Easy Cod Traybake or Thai Turkey Lettuce Wraps (find the recipes at goodhousekeeping.com/uk).

DITCH THE DRINK for two weeks

Alcohol is a triple-edged sword for fat gain. Firstly, alcoholic drinks are high

Stop having SNACCIDENTS

Snacking is one habit that's hard to break. Eating sugary foods satisfies a taste craving, but doesn't fill you up, leaving you wanting more. It can also play havoc with your blood glucose levels, triggering the pancreas to release the hormone insulin. Too much insulin speeds up sugar's conversion into fat, depositing it around your midsection or elsewhere.

So, how can you break the snacking habit? In his book, *The Hungry Brain*, Stephen Guyenet recommends modifying your environment so it doesn't present tempting food cues. One way to do that is by making tempting foods harder to access. For instance, keeping snacks in the back of your cupboards instead of keeping them on the worktop where they're easy to grab. Or, not having them around at all. If the food isn't there, it's easier to resist and you are less likely to get a craving for it.



in calories and have no nutritional value, which is bad news for your waistline. Secondly, alcohol leads to poor decisions about food, so you're more likely to reach for takeaways or chocolate. Thirdly, when you drink alcohol, the body treats it as a toxin and channels all of its energy into getting rid of it. So, while your body's burning the calories in alcohol, it won't be burning carbs, fats or protein. This means that anything you eat while drinking is likely to get stored as fat.

Cutting out alcohol completely may feel a step too far, but if you can commit to at least two weeks without a drink, you will enhance your weight loss. Otherwise, learn to enjoy and savour one drink, then stop there. If you love your wine, make it go further by adding soda water to make a spritzer. Don't drink on an empty stomach; try to always eat a meal beforehand and try to resist the temptation of ordering a takeaway after drinking. Cutting down with a friend or partner will make you more likely to stick to it and break bad habits.





Don't CUT OUT FATS COMPLETELY

It may surprise you to learn that fats themselves don't necessarily make you fat – rather it's the combination of fat with sugar in mouthwatering foods such as cakes and chocolate that alters brain chemistry, disrupts your appetite and makes you overeat. In a study by Yale University, scientists showed that such foods reinforce a greater sense of reward than foods of an equal calorie content that contain mostly fats or carbohydrates. In short, you don't have to cut fats completely. Swap some of the saturated fats in your diet (butter, fatty meat, sausages, cakes) for unsaturated fats in avocados, olive oil, oily fish, nuts and seeds. These fats help you feel satiated and also reduce your risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke.

Learn to DE-STRESS

Manage your stress by controlling what's controllable (sleep, nutrition and exercise) and letting go of what you cannot control. Stress causes the body to produce more cortisol, which can impair your body's ability to lose weight. It is often associated with unhealthy habits, such as emotional eating, not getting enough sleep, skipping meals and exercising less – all of which can lead to weight gain. Among the best ways to lower stress and anxiety are meditation, breathing exercises and yoga. In one recent study, women who practised stress-reducing interventions, such as yoga, reported less stress and stress-related eating.

Swap saturated fats for unsaturated fats to aid weight loss



Find out how to SLEEP WELL

Lack of sleep can increase levels of the hunger hormone ghrelin, which in turn will increase hunger and appetite. This makes overeating more likely. One study showed that people who slept just 4.5 hours per night for four consecutive nights consumed 340 more calories – mostly from extra snacks – than those who got 8.5 hours sleep. To ensure a better night's sleep, try the following:

- **Ditch your phone and other devices at least 60 minutes before bed.**
- Stick to the same sleep and wake time every day to help set your body's internal clock.
- **Limit caffeine after lunchtime to let your body wind down before bedtime.**
- Take five minutes before bedtime to

- jot down your thoughts or to-do lists and give yourself some mental space to relax.
- **Try to get outside in natural light in the morning, whether it's a quick walk or some stretching in your garden.**
- In the evenings, dim overhead lights to prepare your brain for sleep.



EAT PROTEIN at every meal

Protein reduces levels of hunger hormones and makes you feel fuller for longer, so you are less likely to snack. It speeds up your metabolism every time you eat it – a phenomenon called the thermic effect of eating. Research shows that, while in a calorie deficit, consuming a little more protein than you do normally can help preserve your lean body mass and prevent the metabolic slow-down that normally accompanies weight loss. Make sure each of your meals contains a high-protein food, such as chicken, fish, milk, cheese, eggs, tofu, beans, lentils or peas.



Load up on FIBRE

Apart from keeping things moving, fibre also reduces hunger and keeps you feeling full. Studies show that foods rich in viscous fibre (beans, lentils, chickpeas, oats, nuts, seeds, fruit and vegetables) are best for reducing appetite because they form a gel that holds water. Fibre also feeds the 'good' bacteria in your gut – research shows lean people have more diverse gut bacteria than overweight people. The best way to nurture your gut bacteria is by eating a diverse diet rich in fruit, vegetables, beans, lentils, whole grains, nuts and seeds. Fibre provides 'food' for them, enabling 'good' bacteria to thrive and multiply and crowding out harmful bacteria.

Be FLEXIBLE

Not depriving yourself of foods you love and enjoying the occasional indulgence without feeling guilty is important from a psychological standpoint. Many people find that regularly including their favourite foods in small portions satisfies their cravings and keeps them motivated to adhere to their weight-loss diet for long periods of time. If you know you can eat a little of your favourite food regularly, then you'll stop thinking of it as a forbidden food and won't want to overeat it.



Wise up to HORMONE CHANGES

Falling oestrogen levels during perimenopause and menopause can change the way fat is stored and distributed, with it more likely to be stored around the middle than the hips. This may explain why many women notice a change in their shape during this time, despite not changing their food intake. Additionally, many symptoms of the perimenopause and menopause lead us to gain weight – for example mood swings, fatigue and lack of sleep can result in less healthy dietary choices and loss of motivation to exercise.

“Small portions of your favourite foods can help to satisfy your cravings”



Good health

Do the RIGHT TYPES OF EXERCISE



During weight loss, you inevitably lose some muscle as well as fat. However, exercising helps minimise the amount of muscle you lose and prevents your metabolism from slowing down. The more muscle you have, the more calories you burn throughout the day. A review of 15 studies with more than 700 people found the best strategy of all for weight loss is doing a combination of aerobic and resistance exercise.

Aerobic activities (jogging, dancing, swimming) are great for your heart health and helping your body stay in calorie deficit. Resistance exercises (weights, power yoga, pilates, exercise bands or body weight exercises such as squats) prevent the metabolic slow-down and muscle loss that accompanies weight loss. The best approach to exercise is to find something that boosts your mood that you'll stick to. Explore ways of exercising that you find fun, such as dancing, cycling, jogging, taking long walks in nature or practising yoga. □



Prevent muscle loss by doing some yoga