Smart Weight Loss

Set small goals and think long-term. It may take 2-3 years to reach a healthy weight. Expect ½ to 1-pound weight loss per week average. The number on the scale is a **result,** not a goal. Set small goals to change habits that will lead to weight loss.

Plan extra time each week. Healthy eating takes time to plan. This includes time for meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking, food preparation, and cleanup.

Figure out why you eat. If you reach for food when bored, stressed, or sad, you may be giving your body food it doesn't need. Learn to identify true hunger and to cope with emotions instead of eating. Read Heath Facts for You #407, Exploring Why You Eat.

Get rid of sugary drinks. Sugar hides in soda, sweet tea, lemonade, sport drinks, energy drinks, fruit juice and coffee drinks.

Eat 3 meals and 0-3 snacks each day. Make time for breakfast. Don't skip meals. Try to eat every 3-5 hours.

Plan your day. Make a list and grocery shop once per week. Bring food to work or school each day.

Limit restaurant and take-out meals to 2 times per week or less.

Drink plenty of water- 6-8 cups (48-64 ounces) daily. Make at least half of your total liquid water.

Use smaller plates and bowls. Use an 8-inch plate for meals (most dinner plates are 11-12 inches). This helps you eat smaller portions.

Eat at least 1-2 cups of fruit and 2-3 cups of vegetables daily. Include a fruit or vegetable with every meal and snack. Eat fruit and vegetables first to help decrease hunger for the rest of the meal.

Exercise about 30-60 minutes per day. Walk, bike, or swim at a moderately brisk pace. Start slowly and increase intensity, duration and frequency of the exercise as able.

Limit screen time. Aim for less than 10 hours per week playing on the computer or watching TV.

Write down what you eat every day. You can use paper and pencil or try free web tools or phone apps to help you keep track.

Weigh yourself once a week, at most. It may be better to hide the scale and focus on how you feel and how clothes fit.

Use a support network. Keep a personal journal to track your progress. Talk with a friend, attend a support group, or follow up with a dietitian every week to discuss your progress.

Who to Call

If you have questions, please contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan. For a list of UW Health Clinics, please visit www.uwhealth.org/.

You may also visit our website at: www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 11/2026. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#531.