

Tips for Weight Management

Energy needs are often elevated initially after a brain injury and then decrease over time. In addition, you may have a decrease in physical activity and muscle mass after a brain injury, which can lead to weight gain long-term. Magic pills, shots or crash diets will not help with healthy, lasting weight loss. It is important to know your weight goals and adjust your food intake and physical activity to meet your goals. If you need diet education or help controlling dietary intake, ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian.

It is important to consider how much you eat and what types of foods you eat to control your body weight.

How much do you eat?

Cutting back on serving sizes and second servings can help you lose weight gradually.

- Tune in to your hunger and fullness cues. Ask yourself if you are actually hungry or if you are eating out of boredom or emotional reasons. Stop eating when you feel full.
- Eat smaller, more frequent, balanced meals throughout the day.
- Eat off of a smaller plate. This may help you with portion control.
- When eating out, ask for half of your meal to be boxed up before you start to eat.

What do you eat?

Foods that are high in unhealthy fat and sugar tend to be high in calories and low in healthy nutrients. Regularly including these foods can lead to unhealthy weight gain. Often people find that they can lose weight just by decreasing or eliminating the amount of high-fat and high-sugar substances they are eating, such as desserts, soft drinks, and juices. Remember to choose balanced, healthy meals so that your body gets the nutrients it needs from all the necessary food groups.

Here are a few other tips to cut down on calories without compromising nutrition:

Protein Group: Choose lean protein such as fish, poultry, eggs or beans. Trim away all fat on meat. Prepare meals by broiling, baking, roasting or grilling instead of frying. Protein foods should typically take up approximately one quarter of your plate.

Fruit and Vegetable Groups: Most vegetables are low in calories and make up nutritious parts of meals and snacks. Avoid adding butter, margarine, sauces, and dressings to vegetables because those will increase the fat and caloric content. Choose fresh fruit instead of drinking fruit juice. If consuming canned fruit, choose fruit packed in its own juice instead of syrup. Try to make fruits and vegetables make up one half of your plate at lunch and dinner.

Milk Group: Choose low fat or fat free dairy products to cut down on the calories and unhealthy fat. Switch to skim or 1% milk rather than whole or 2% milk. Choose low fat or part skim cheeses instead of regular, full fat cheese. Switch to low fat or fat free yogurts.

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Grain Group: Monitor the portion sizes of your grains. They should typically take up approximately one quarter of your plate. Consume more whole grains instead of processed or refined grains. Whole grain options include whole wheat, oats, barley, rye, quinoa, couscous, brown rice, and whole wheat pasta. Limit refined grains and grain products made with fat, such as biscuits, croissants, pancakes, waffles, and prepackaged desserts. They contain more calories than other bread products. Avoid adding butter or margarine to breads.

Fats and Oils: Limit the amount of saturated and trans fats in your diet by limiting fried food, packaged food, and high-fat meats. Include heart-healthy fats like oils and nuts/nut butters in your diet. It is important to monitor your portion sizes, even with healthy fats, because they are high in calories. Choose fat free or reduced fat salad dressing and mayonnaise.

Fluids: Staying well hydrated is important for general health. Good hydration is also important because sometimes we confuse thirst with hunger. Choose diet or sugar free drinks such as water, crystal light, sparkling water, and diet drinks flavored with artificial sweeteners instead of juice, regular soda, or sweet tea.

Snacks: Snacks can be part of a healthy diet, but it is important to choose healthy snacks that will promote satiety and energy. Combine a grain, fruit or vegetable with a healthy fat or protein to help you stay full. For example, eat a fruit with peanut butter or some whole grain crackers with low fat cheese. Avoid snacking on junk foods such as chips and cookies because these are high in calories and won't keep you feeling full.

Desserts: Most desserts are high in calories, sugar, and unhealthy fats. Try fruit, sugar free pudding, or low fat yogurt as healthier dessert options. Limit high fat desserts like cakes, pies, candy, and cookies to special occasions and monitor your portion size.

Exercise: In addition to dietary recommendations, exercise is an important factor in long-term weight loss. Exercise burns calories and builds muscle mass. Talk to your physical therapist to plan the best type of exercise regimen for you.

Summary

Make your weight goals realistic and achievable. Do not expect to lose a lot of weight quickly and then to keep it off long-term. A healthy rate of weight loss is about one-half to two pounds a week. Quicker weight loss often leads to water loss and muscle wasting. Losing fat takes patience and changes to eating and exercise habits. Enlist friends, family, and your healthcare team to provide support and help you meet your goals.

After achieving your weight goals, it is important to continue your healthy diet and lifestyle modifications. A person cannot go back to old eating habits without gaining pounds back. Incorporate sustainable habits and healthy eating into your daily routine to help achieve lasting results.