

4.5 If You Diet, Do It Sustainably

Choose a style of eating that you can continue indefinitely.

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Diet culture is everywhere, but many diets are aimed at short-term results rather than long-term health. Many people lose a little weight and then find that they can't sustain their dieting habits due to insatiable hunger or emotional factors. If you do decide to choose a diet, picking a way of eating that you're able to continue for years rather than weeks or months gives you a much better chance of losing weight at a healthy pace—and keeping it off.

Generally, we all know the best foods for us to eat, but our choices don't always reflect that knowledge. It may be that we get in the habit of eating convenient fast food, or we try a fad diet and—after the initial weight loss—find it difficult to maintain. At this point, many people regain whatever weight they lost—and even more. Instead, it's better to think strategically and pick long-term, realistic goals.

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- By concentrating on sustainability, you set yourself up to stick with a diet and attain key long-term health goals.
- Building habits that support overall well-being develops a sense of ownership and accountability around food.

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- Quick-fix diets are tempting for a reason—they promise rapid change. Dieting sustainably requires the discipline to reject the promise of miraculous results in favor of slow and steady progress.
- Maintaining motivation over the long term can be tough, especially when weight loss is slow or plateaus.

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When evaluating a new eating plan, approach it systematically by first assessing its compatibility with your existing lifestyle rather than trying to entirely reshape your life around the diet. To do this, consider the following steps:

1. Identify your personal dietary preferences and needs: Make a list of foods you enjoy—and want to keep eating—and those you dislike, along with any dietary restrictions you have due to health conditions or personal beliefs.
2. Assess the diet's restrictions and allowances: Does it ban foods you love? Does it allow foods you dislike? Is it flexible enough to accommodate your lifestyle?
3. Establish a plan for setbacks: Despite your best efforts, there may be days when you deviate from your chosen diet. Rather than viewing this as a failure, have a plan in place to handle such instances. This could include healthier substitutes for your cravings or a strategy to get back on track after a slipup.

4. Secure a support system: Connect with someone you can reach out to when following your chosen plan is tough. This could be a friend, spouse, therapist, or even a support group. This kind of support system can provide motivation, accountability, and advice when things get challenging.

For instance, if you have a sweet tooth, a low-carbohydrate diet might not be sustainable for you. Instead, consider a plan that allows for a moderate intake of sugar. Similarly, if you enjoy fried foods but have high cholesterol, find a diet that incorporates healthy oils and cholesterol-lowering foods. Remember, the goal is to find a balance that ensures you get both nutritional value and satisfaction from your meals.
