

Weight loss: Ready to change your habits?

Written by Mayo Clinic staff
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Are you motivated to lose weight? Is your weight-loss goal realistic? Answer these questions and more to make sure you're ready to start a weight-loss program — and know what steps to take if you aren't quite there.

Your weight-loss success depends in large part on your readiness to take on the challenge. If you jump in before you're ready, your weight-loss plan might buckle under the first challenge.

Use these questions to assess your weight-loss readiness.

1. Are you motivated to make long-term lifestyle changes?

Successful weight loss depends on permanent lifestyle changes, such as eating healthy foods and including physical activity in your daily routine. That could represent a significant departure from your current lifestyle.

Be honest.

Knowing that you need to make changes in your life and actually doing it are two different things. You might need to overhaul your diet so that you're eating more whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products, for example. You'll also need to find time for physical activity, ideally at least 30 to 45 minutes — or more — nearly every day of the week.

Whether your motivation for undertaking these changes is better health, improved appearance or simply feeling better about yourself, find your motivation and focus on it.

2. Have you addressed the big distractions in your life?

If you're dealing with major life events, such as marital problems, job stress, illness or financial worries, you might not want to add the challenge of overhauling your eating and exercise habits. Instead, consider giving your life a chance to calm down before you launch your weight-loss program.

3. Do you have a realistic picture of how much weight you'll lose and how quickly?

Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is a lifelong process. Start by making sure your weight-loss goal is safe and realistic — such as losing 10 percent of your current weight. Then aim to lose 1 to 2 pounds (0.5 to 1 kilogram) a week until you reach your goal. This means burning 500 to 1,000 calories more than you consume each day — through diet, exercise or both.

You might lose weight more quickly if you change your habits significantly. Be careful, though. Radical changes that aren't sustainable aren't likely to be effective over the long term.

4. Have you resolved any emotional issues connected to your weight?

Emotions and food are often intertwined. Anger, stress, grief and boredom can trigger emotional

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eating. If you have a history of an eating disorder, weight loss can be even trickier.

To prepare for the challenges, identify any emotional issues related to food. Talk to your doctor or a mental health provider, if needed.

5. Do you have support and accountability?

Any weight-loss program can be difficult. You might face moments of temptation or become disheartened. Having someone in your corner to offer encouragement can help. If you don't have friends or loved ones you can rely on for positive help, consider joining a weight-loss support group.

If you want to keep your weight-loss efforts private, be prepared to be accountable to yourself with regular weigh-ins and a log of your diet and activity. You might also want to consider joining an online program or using a certified health coach.

6. Have you embraced the weight-loss challenge?

If you don't have a positive attitude about losing weight, you might not be ready — and if you dread what lies ahead, you might be more likely to find excuses to veer off course.

Instead, try to embrace the vision of your new lifestyle and remain positive. Focus on how good you'll feel when you're more active or when you weigh less. Picture yourself celebrating every success along the way, whether it's enjoying a new food, finishing another exercise session or losing your first few pounds.

Your results: Ready or not?

Think about your responses to the questions above:

- **Did you answer yes to all or most of the questions?** You're probably ready to make the lifestyle changes that'll support permanent weight loss. Forge ahead with a healthy diet and regular physical activity — starting today! If you think you need help, consult a dietitian or enroll in a reputable weight-loss program. If you have a significant amount of weight to lose, you might benefit from medically supervised weight loss with a team of health professionals — such as a dietitian, a therapist or an obesity specialist.

- **Did you answer no to more than one of the questions?** You might not be ready to embark on a weight-loss program right now - and that's OK. Explore what's holding you back and face those obstacles. Consider seeking help from your doctor or another professional, such as a certified wellness coach, to help you work through these issues. Then re-evaluate your readiness for weight loss so that you can get started on the path to a healthier weight.

If you couldn't answer all of the questions with a simple yes or no but you feel generally positive about most of your answers and you're upbeat about a weight-loss program, consider starting now. You might never have definitive answers in life. Don't let that rob you of a chance to

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achieve your weight-loss goals.