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Linda S. Boeckner

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, lboeckner1@unl.edu

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Action Steps for Healthy Weight Management for Adults

By Linda Boeckner, Extension Nutrition Specialist

The weight-loss industry is a multimillion dollar business. A 2005 study of the weight-loss effectiveness of some popular diets indicated that results are best when individuals have the greatest adherence to the diet. The following information outlines actions that can help every adult manage his or her body weight realistically, and with the potential for the greatest adherence.

These nine action steps can be adopted by all adults and used to develop healthy approaches to managing weight for a lifetime.

1. Be Physically Active

Research indicates that moderate levels of physical activity produce healthful benefits. Physical activity is a morale booster, and people who choose to be active feel good about themselves.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans indicate that at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity benefits health. The activity can be completed all at one time or broken up into smaller amounts throughout the day. To prevent weight gain during adulthood and manage body weight, work toward 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity on most days of the week.

To increase your physical activity, determine how active you are now. Identify times of the day when you could add more activity. Parking farther out in a parking lot as you go to work or go shopping increases activity. Squeeze in walks during lunch hours or after an evening meal. Start gently and slowly.

2. Talk Positively to Yourself

Positive self-talk will allow you to identify aspects of yourself that you like and appreciate. When you focus on your likable traits and grow in appreciation of them you will have less time to belittle personal characteristics. Positive self-talk encourages positive thinking and positive actions.

3. Set Goals

Chart a course for yourself. Set small, achievable goals. Work on one or two goals at a time.

Examples:

- This week I will purchase 1% milk for my family rather than whole milk.
- At least three times this week I will use my lunch hour to walk for 15 minutes.
- I will prepare a low-fat main dish for myself and my family at least once this week.
- I will record my food intake at meals and snacks this week.

4. Reward Yourself

Give yourself a reward when you achieve a goal or do something that has required effort. These can be small gifts to yourself, such as allowing special time for yourself or with others, or going to special events. Rewards are best when they occur soon after your accomplishment.

5. Choose Lower Fat and Limit Added Sugar

Low to moderate fat intakes are between 27 to 78 grams of fat (about 6 to 15 teaspoons) each day if your energy needs are between 1,200 to 2,000 kilocalories. Work toward lower fat intakes by:

- selecting lean meat, fish or poultry and using meat substitutes such as dry beans;
- eating low-fat or nonfat dairy products; and
- limiting use of high-fat spreads, sauces and gravies.

Sugar added to foods is a source of unnecessary calories. Become a label reader and look for products that have the least added sugar.

If you are eating at fast food restaurants much of the time, carefully select your food to limit fried foods and sugar-filled beverages. Use only small amounts of added toppings or condiments on your food.

6. Watch Portion Sizes

There are no forbidden foods but sometimes the *amount* you eat is the source of extra calories. Check your serving sizes. If your serving sizes are consistently large, trim them down.

Serving Sizes of Common Foods

Breads, cereals and other grain products

- 1 slice bread
- 1/2 hamburger bun or English muffin
- 1 cup dry cereal
- 1/2 cup rice, pasta, or cooked cereal

Vegetables

- 1/2 cup cooked or chopped raw vegetables
- 1 cup leafy raw vegetable
- 1/2 cup vegetable juice

Fruits

- 1 whole medium fruit
- 1/2 larger fruit
- 1/2 cup fresh berries
- 1/2 cup canned fruit
- 1/2 cup juice
- 1/4 cup dried fruit

Milk, cheese and yogurt

- 1 cup milk
- 8 oz or 1 cup yogurt
- 1 1/2 - 2 ounces cheese

Meat, fish, poultry, dry beans and eggs

- 2-3 ounces lean meat, fish or poultry
- 1 egg = approximately 1 ounce meat
- 1/4 cup cooked dry beans = 1 ounce meat
- 1 Tbsp peanut butter = 1 ounce meat
- 1/2 ounce nuts or seeds = 1 ounce meat

7. Assess Your Own Healthy Weight

Too much emphasis has been placed on fitting into a certain weight category or wearing a certain clothing size. To help with your lifelong weight management efforts, identify what a healthy weight is for you. The following Web site has information about body mass index that can be personalized for your height: <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>.

Check your family history of weight-related diseases. With a family history of adult onset (Type II) diabetes, premature heart disease, or high blood pressure, you will need to be more careful about your own weight.

In addition, establish how much body fat you are carrying. If excess fat is carried around your abdomen, there is greater risk of disease. If you can pinch more than an inch or your waist measure is equal to or greater than your hip measurement, your excess fat is huddling around your midsection and putting your health at risk.

8. Complete a Behavior Inventory

One of the most useful steps in managing weight is to keep a behavior inventory. Check your snacking habits and how you prepare foods. Do you eat in response to hunger?

Snacks can be a part of your daily food plan but they need to be planned carefully. Snack choices make a big difference in energy intake if you select high-fat, sugar-added snacks.

Determine how hungry you are when you eat. Delay eating if you are not really hungry. Make note of whether you use extra added fat as you cook, and make adjustments when possible. Other things to look for in a behavior inventory are your shopping skills and habits, your moods or feelings when you eat, and the time and place in which you do most of your eating. If any of these factors are excessive or affect your ability to manage your weight, think how you can make some changes.

9. Choose a Variety of Foods

Build your daily food choices around a variety of foods from **all** the groups (grains; bread and cereal; vegetables; fruits; dairy products; and meat/meat substitutes). Eat within the recommended number of servings for each food group to meet your nutritional needs. By watching your portion size and choosing lower fat and limiting added sugar you will develop food habits that will last a lifetime and will help you to manage your weight. For more information on planning your diet pattern, go to <http://MyPyramid.gov>.

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