



Behavior changes key in weight loss

What are some of the things people do (besides eating less) to help them lose weight successfully?

That's an interesting question. Most people, for obvious reasons, focus on food when trying to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight.

But behavioral scientists studying successful weight loss have found a few strategies beyond cutting calories that seem to work for many who have lost weight and kept it off.

In a recent study in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, researchers at the University of Minnesota studied behaviors of more than 400 people who successfully lost at least 10 percent of their body weight in the past year. The researchers grouped the behaviors in four major categories:

- **Regularity of meals:** People who tended to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner routinely were more likely to have better success at weight loss during the past year. They were also more likely to eat more fruits and vegetables.

- **TV-related viewing and eating:** Participants were asked how often they ate snacks or meals in front of the television, how much TV they watched on an average day, and how often they ate after 7 p.m. Those who were more likely to engage in those behaviors tended to have a higher BMI (or body mass index, a standard measure of body fat based

on height and weight) and higher fat and sugar intake.

- **Eating away from home:** These behaviors include eating out at a restaurant (sit down or fast food); eating food provided by an employer or another employee at work; purchasing food at a convenience store or a gas station; and purchasing food items for a fundraiser. People who did these things more often had a higher fat and sugar intake and a lower fruit and vegetable intake, and engaged in less physical activity.

- **Intentional strategies for weight control:** Participants were asked how often they wrote down the amount and type of exercise they engaged in, as well as the calorie content of the food they ate; how often they planned meals and exercise in order to manage their weight; and how often they used meal replacements. Those who did these things more often saw many benefits: they tended to have a lower BMI; they experienced greater weight loss in the last year; they had a lower fat and sugar intake; they ate more fruits and vegetables; and they engaged in more physical activity.

Take a look at the behaviors and see if any of them make sense to incorporate in your life. Adopting a few healthy strategies can make a big difference.

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