



WELLNESS CONNECTION

3 Steps to Building a Healthy Habit

Building healthy habits is key to living well, aging well, and managing a long-term health condition. But if you've ever set a new health goal, you know that changing behavior is easier said than done. Building healthy habits isn't easy, but it's worth it, and these 3 steps can help you succeed.

1. Make a plan.

Make a clear plan of action before you begin your new habit. Start by defining your "why." Why do you want to make this change? What will be different about your life when you succeed? Write down your "why" and remember it or post it somewhere in your home. When challenges present themselves, it'll help you stay on track.

Next, figure out what long-term goal you want to reach, and which new habit will get you there. For example, you may want to change your eating habits by eating more fruits and vegetables. It will help to decide how many per day, and how you can add them into your meals and snacks. Choose your action and make it SMART. This means:

What is a habit?

Habits are all the daily actions you take that have become automatic. Habits can either help you move closer to your health goals or get in the way of your progress. The key is to keep making that healthy choice until it becomes second nature. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

- S- specific
- M- measurable
- A- achievable
- R- relevant
- T- time-bound

Instead of saying "I'll eat more vegetables," try a SMART goal like "I'll eat a side salad with dinner on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays."

2. Be accountable.

Did you know that tracking a new habit makes you more likely to succeed? Tracking your progress can help you figure out what's working and what isn't, so you can learn as you go. It also encourages you to keep going and hold yourself accountable.

Some people prefer to track on their own with an online app, food diary, notebook, or spreadsheet. Other people benefit from social support to stay on track, like a walking partner, a gym buddy, members of their household, or friends who'll keep them honest. If you have diabetes or prediabetes, don't forget about some of the programs that can provide additional support.

3. Recognize your success.

Find rewards that celebrate your success while also supporting your health goals. This could include taking time for your favorite hobbies, relaxing, or treating yourself to something on your wish list.

You may feel discouraged if you've started a new habit and don't see results right away. But that doesn't mean your habit isn't working. It's also OK if things don't always go according to plan. Sometimes the biggest success to celebrate is picking yourself up and not giving up.

Looking for inspiration?

At the end of the day, your healthy habit is completely up to you. Here are a few ideas if you're looking for a place to start:

- Increase fruits and vegetables.
- Cook more meals at home instead of getting takeout.
- Cut back on unhealthy foods like salty and sugary snacks.
- Substitute whole grains (e.g., brown rice instead of white rice).
- Add short walks into your routine.
- Try a new activity at home like yoga, tai chi, Zumba, or strength exercises.
- Increase your water intake.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/library/features/3-steps-building-healthy-habit.html>



Celebrations and Gatherings

Start *simple*
with MyPlate



Healthy eating is important at every stage of life, including celebrations and gatherings. Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods, and dairy or fortified soy alternatives. When deciding what to eat or drink, choose options that are full of nutrients and limited in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Start with these tips:



Serve up variety

At your next event, create a colorful buffet table that includes a variety of foods from all the food groups.



Cheers to good health

Serve water or unsweetened iced tea with fresh mint leaves. Offer seltzer water with a splash of 100% fruit juice or a wedge of lemon or lime.



Make activity part of the fun

Laugh, mingle, dance, and play games. Have fun walking and talking with family and friends after a special meal.



Rethink dessert

Offer a combination of fresh and dried fruit. Put out fixings for guests to make their own trail mix with a combination of peanuts, dark chocolate chips, and dried fruits.



Reduce food waste

Manage leftovers by packing them for guests to take home, adding them to soups or salads, and including extra veggies in omelets, sandwiches, or stews.



Try a twist on your favorite dish

Substitute unsweetened applesauce for butter when baking, or use low-fat milk when a recipe calls for cream. Experiment with low-salt herbs and spices.

The benefits of healthy eating add up over time, bite by bite.

Source: https://myplate-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/2022-04/TipSheet_29_Celebrations.pdf

Protect Your Mental Health

- **Take care of your body and mind.** Stick to a schedule, eat well, stay physically active, get quality sleep, stay hydrated, and spend time outside.
- **Invest in healthy relationships.** Socializing is a powerful buffer to stress and a source of well-being. Spend time with others regularly, in-person and virtually.
- **Be intentional about your use of social media, video games, and other technologies.** Ask yourself: How much time am I spending online? Is it taking away from healthy offline activities, like exercising, seeing friends, reading, or sleeping? What content do I see, and how does it make me feel?

- **Learn to manage stress and other difficult emotions.** Try to recognize situations that may be emotionally challenging and come up with strategies to manage those emotions.
- **Ask for help. Find someone you trust to talk to about stressful situations.** If you are struggling to manage negative emotions, reach out to a health care provider, counselor, or person you trust.
- **Call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988** if you or someone you know is in crisis.
- **Get help finding substance use and mental health treatment in your area.** Call the free National Helpline 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or visit www.FindTreatment.gov.

Source: <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2022/09/healthy-social-media-habits>