



## Five Secrets to Life-Long Weight Loss

Most people can lose a quick five or ten pounds before a big event. But how do you keep the weight off — today, tomorrow, and for the rest of your life? Not even everyone with "lucky genes" can stay slim for a lifetime without the help of a few basic strategies.

These five secrets to lifelong weight loss can keep you leaner — and more important, healthier — now and forever.

### Lifelong weight-loss secret #1:

Acknowledge that your body and your life change as you get older, and fine-tune your habits accordingly.

Aging begins well before you turn 40 or 50. "Lifelong weight loss comes down to paying attention at every life stage," says Beth Reardon, director of integrative nutrition at Duke Integrative Medicine, part of the Duke University Health System. "You need to acknowledge that you're always changing, and you can't do the same things you've always done to maintain the same weight."

To put this in practice:

- **Leave food on your plate.** The older you get, the more your metabolism slows — one to two percent a year after age 30, Reardon says. "It doesn't take much food to add up to weight creep. Three extra bites can add 100 calories a day, or ten pounds at the end of the year."
- **Move away from three square meals a day.** Digestion slows as we age, especially digestion of fiber. So lightening the load by eating smaller, lighter meals and healthful snacks keeps your energy levels more stable and makes you less prone to hungry gorging.
- **Count the liquid calories.** A five-ounce pour of wine with dinner contains about 150 calories. That can add up to 15 extra pounds in a year. Two glasses? Double that.
- **Pay attention to how food is prepared.** Midlife and older adults often cook less and eat out more. But when you're not controlling the food prep, extra calories sneak in. It's not that you shouldn't socialize but that you need to be hyperaware of what's going in your mouth.

## **Lifelong weight-loss secret #2:**

Keep moving (not necessarily in the gym).

A gradually slowing metabolism from young adulthood onward means you need to eat less than you could in your 20s to keep weight comparable. But you can also compensate for the slowdown by fighting midlife inertia and a sedentary lifestyle. Thinner people move more, numerous studies have shown. Lean older adults don't necessarily follow vigorous workouts; rather, they keep moving all throughout their day — gardening, doing chores, walking, climbing stairs, and staying engaged and active.

To put this in practice:

- **Get up — every hour.** One famous study found that obese people sat for 9.5 hours a day, compared with lean people, who sat fewer than 7 hours a day. University of South Carolina researchers found in 2011 that people who sit more have larger waist sizes (along with a host of undesirable blood-work results). But it's not enough to sit for long periods and then go physically wild; better to stand up and exert calories throughout the day, which stimulates muscles and body functions better.
- **Rely less on "labor-saving devices."** One Mayo Clinic study compared those who performed daily chores like dish washing and doing local errands manually or on foot with people who did the same things with electric or mechanical devices like dishwashers and cars. The comparative calorie savings were small (26 extra calories for hand-washing the dishes), but they added up, day after day, to the tune of as many as 11 more pounds per year for those who relied on devices. Obviously you can't walk everywhere, but the takeaway is that the more you can do on your own, the better for your body.
- **Wear a pedometer.** This can help you track how much you're moving. Aim for 10,000 steps a day.
- **Start fidgeting.** Research shows that some people are natural-born fidgeters, genetically programmed to move around more than others. But that doesn't mean you can't train yourself to emulate them.

## **Lifelong weight-loss secret #3: Eat plants — all day, every day.**

Michael Pollan, author of *Food Rules*, has famously distilled healthful eating to "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." Reardon favors the acronym "PBD, GDI," which stands for the advice she gives dozens of times a week to clients with health and weight issues: "Plant-based diet, gosh darn it!" The gosh-darn-it part is because she comes back to this basic so often, for so many circumstances. "Eating lighter, eating better, always comes back to a more plant-based diet," she says.

To put this in practice:

- ***Include a plant at every meal, every snack.*** Don't worry about how many fruits and vegetables you're supposed to eat in a day. Just include one at every single meal and snack, Reardon suggests.
- ***Make sure veggies and grains dominate your plate.*** Break free of the "meat-potato-veggie" definition of a decent meal. Don't limit yourself to just one vegetable per meal, and explore the wide world of whole grains. Consider meat a condiment.
- ***Choose fruits, vegetables, and grains that are fresh and whole.*** By definition, you'll be eating fewer processed foods. That, in turn, helps you minimize sodium, which is bad for blood vessels that grow less flexible and more prone to high blood pressure over time. Eating fewer processed foods also helps you avoid inflammatory fats. Chronic inflammation is a biochemical process that can fuel unwanted weight gain.

#### **Lifelong weight-loss secret #4: Stay super hydrated.**

Sure, water fills up your stomach — but that's not the only reason drinking a lot will help keep your weight low. It's important to keep well hydrated, especially as you get older, because thirst receptors lose their ability to recognize thirstiness over time, says Duke University's Beth Reardon. Since we're water-based beings, our organs rely on staying well hydrated in order to perform optimally. Older adults often take multiple medications that need to be metabolized by the liver, for example, and drinking water helps flush them through the system.

You might not directly connect this process to your scale, but stabilizing weight is easier when the body's organs are performing optimally.

To put this in practice:

- ***Don't confuse hunger with thirst.*** "Make sure that before you grab something to eat, you check whether you're really thirsty," says Reardon.
- ***Carry a water bottle everywhere.*** Bring it in the car, to doctor's appointments, when you're going for a walk — "just like you carry your wallet everywhere," Reardon says.
- ***Make water tasty.*** To help develop the habit, try flavoring your water. Drop in a lemon or orange wedge, or even a slice of watermelon or some berries. Or add an herbal tea bag or flavored green tea bag to cool or room-temperature water to enhance its taste.

#### **Lifelong weight-loss secret #5:**

Don't be a night owl.

Sure, plenty of skinny twenty-somethings pull all-nighters, party, and burn their digital devices at both ends. Trouble is, it's a hard lifestyle to sustain into midlife and beyond while also keeping pounds off. Kids, work woes, a condition called sleep apnea, and, by one's 40s and 50s, bladder issues that trigger trips to the bathroom can all keep you up at night. And a large body of research now shows that poor sleep directly influences how tightly those pants fit when you get dressed in the morning. On average, those who sleep less, weigh more.

Why? People with disrupted sleep cycles or who fail to get enough restorative sleep experience many hormonal shifts that influence appetite. Levels of leptin, which regulates satiety, sink; ghrelin, which triggers appetite, rises. Many people with poor sleep have poorer control of their cravings. And cortisol (a.k.a. the stress hormone) rises too, which can contribute to insulin resistance and prediabetes. Six to eight hours of sleep is an often-cited goal for those trying to break this problematic cycle.

To put this in practice:

- ***Consider sleep as important to weight control as diet and exercise.*** Most people simply discount sleep. But lifelong weight loss is more than simply a calories-in-calories-out formula.
- ***Learn how to manage problems that interfere with sleep, such as sleep apnea or overactive bladder triggers.*** Physical problems are often at the root of disrupted sleep.
- ***Avoid eating close to bedtime.*** Your body will spend energy digesting the food rather than shifting into restorative sleep, Reardon says. Best: Leave at least three hours between dinner and bed. If you must have something, make it a glass of milk, which may increase serotonin levels.
- ***Try enhancing sleep with supplements.*** Magnesium and melatonin have relaxing, sedative qualities. Periodic use of over-the-counter sleep aids can also help reset a pattern of disrupted sleep.
- ***If you're a caregiver and someone else's sleep is affecting yours, get help.*** Ask a doctor about medications that can help regulate sleep in an older adult with dementia who has sundown syndrome, for example. Your sanity, your health, and, yes, your weight management may all depend on it.

**\*\*Remember to:**

- 1) Always plan ahead for what you are going to eat**
- 2) Obtain adequate amounts of protein**
- 3) Work on your flexibility and**
- 4) Supplement your diet with a fish oil and multivitamin**

**Let me know if I can help. Email me at [architechsports@gmail.com](mailto:architechsports@gmail.com)**

**Alan Tyson**

**Physical Therapist, Athletic Trainer, Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist**