

8 Ways to Stop Obsessing About Weight Loss

Throw your scale away and learn how to lose weight and get in shape without driving yourself crazy.

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As another year comes to a close, lots of promises to get in shape and lose weight remain unfulfilled. Let's face it, most of us have the same resolution over and over again, like vowing to give up junk food and start exercising on New Year's Day only to find ourselves on the sofa enjoying a bag of chips within a few days. While lots of folks will abandon their efforts in just a few days or weeks on the treadmill, others may find themselves obsessed with finally trimming the fat for good.

But how do you know when you've taken things too far? Is ordering your dressing on the side or having a daily weigh-in a sign of obsession, or are these just examples of some of the small ways you can help achieve your weight loss goals? We asked two experts to weigh in on some of the warning signs that you've taken your [fitness](#) or diet routine too far, and they offered tips for preventing obsessive thoughts and behavior.

Remember the Weight of Water

You might want to try scaling back when it comes to weighing yourself. In fact, you might want to skip the scale all together, says Olivia H. Beckman, MD, who is the medical director of the eating disorders program at Walden Behavioral Care. The only reason to have a scale, she says, is to monitor your weight for medical reasons. Otherwise you can leave it to your health care provider to monitor your weight even if you're trying to lose a significant amount. After all, it's natural for our weight to fluctuate by a few pounds on a monthly, even daily basis, especially for women. Beckman says if you find yourself basing your daily fitness and diet on what the scale says in the morning, you're likely to make unhealthy and unnecessary decisions, namely skipping meals or working out excessively. The solution to scale obsession might be as simple as throwing it away, and instead using how your clothing fits -- and how you look and feel physically -- as a weight barometer or guide.

If you need a little motivation for giving up your scale, keep in mind that often minor weight fluctuations aren't as real as the numbers would have you believe. "Quick weight loss is rarely fat loss that stays off but rather a loss that is a mixture of water weight, lean protein mass, and some fat," says **Susan Mitchell, PhD**, a registered dietitian working with a program to help promote the dietary intake of fruits and vegetables.

Eat Based on Nutritional Value Instead of Calories

"Portion size determines total calorie intake, but if all the calories are from [marshmallow](#) peeps, your body will not run like the fine-tuned machine it is designed to be," says Mitchell. "You may lose weight but you may also lose hair, have dry skin, awful nails, and that's just what you see on the outside." Mitchell says you can also lose muscle and bone mass from vitamin and mineral deficiencies, which can lead to [osteoporosis](#).

Stop Playing Survivor at Home

If you're trying to lose weight, especially a significant amount of weight, do it gradually. Remember, slow and steady wins the race. In fact, starvation or rapid weight loss can actually trigger weight obsession, says Beckman. Long-lasting weight loss takes time, so planning to lose weight for a party or wedding or prior to a life change like starting college can also trigger obsession and lead to an eating disorder.

Beckman says if you're starving yourself or not eating enough you're also more likely to trigger binges. Instead, try having smaller meals more frequently or three meals a day, with snacks in between. "The metabolism does better and actually speeds up if you eat regularly," says Beckman. If you're struggling with an eating disorder or obsessive dieting, you should make sure you eat even more regularly to avoid an intense and sudden urge to eat large amounts of food. Try focusing on making smaller, more long-lasting, and less extreme changes. Just make sure that those small changes are in balance with the rest of your life instead of your primary focus.

Pass the Bread Basket

It's not a good sign if you start sweating and feel overwhelmed with [anxiety](#) every time you see, or even dare to eat, a doughnut or some other food chock full of carbs and sugar, especially around special occasions. You want to be reasonable in your consumption of all foods and eat some healthy foods and some junk foods, says Beckman, especially around the holiday season. Too much restriction can lead to late-night bingeing and obsessive thoughts about certain foods. If you're going to a holiday party, for example, check your food anxiety at the door and plan on enjoying a treat. That doesn't mean you have to camp out by the buffet table all night, but plan to enjoy some treats in moderation. Avoid going to the party hungry, which often leads to overindulgence.

Another reason not to ban food groups altogether, like carbohydrates, is the very real health benefits a balanced diet offers. If you are obsessing over your carbohydrate intake, for example, you might be missing important nutrients that only fruits and vegetables can provide. The added bonus? "Because they are high in [fiber](#) and water and low in calories, you can eat a lot more of them and still lose weight," says Mitchell. You'll also feel more satisfied and full after a large salad or bowl of veggies, helping to keep you away from that bag of chips or chocolates hiding not so subtly in your cupboard.

Get a Hobby

The most obvious sign that you or someone you love is obsessed with weight loss is if all you do is talk about it, despite the bored and appalled faces of your friends, family, and co-workers. An obsession isn't a passing thought that you have now and then, Beckman tells WebMD. "It really is an all-day thing." Any obsession can interrupt your life and take you away from more important things that should take precedent. "If your body is your main project, that's obsessive," Beckman says. Try channeling your energy and time into other things that are also as important and fulfilling.

Stop Watching What Other People Eat

It's natural to notice what other people eat, especially your children. But there is a big difference between noticing what someone else eats and dwelling on it, says Beckman. You also want to avoid basing your own dietary decisions on what someone else eats. "It's not about noticing what other people eat; it's about whether or not it is troubling to you."

Don't Take Fitness Too Far

You can have too much of a good thing, even something as healthy as exercise. Beckman says if you hit the gym a few times a week for 30 minutes to an hour or so, you're right on track. But if you find yourself working out two hours a day at the gym, and jogging at night because you need to burn off a dessert you didn't have preapproved in your food diary, you might be in trouble. "If you're exercising because you're

worried about cardiovascular risk in your family, that's a rational, healthy decision," says Beckman. Exercising based on your food intake is not healthy. "Working out to burn off a meal is obsessive."

Recognize When You Need Help

Don't try to manage your weight alone if you think you've developed an eating disorder or are struggling with obsessive thinking and behavior. Beckman recommends that you enlist the help of a therapist, doctor, and nutritionist. Luckily there is a broad spectrum of treatment available, both inpatient and outpatient programs, depending on the severity of your condition. If you think you're on your way to developing an eating disorder or are already in the grips of one, don't put off getting help. And if you're just trying to get rid of some extra weight, take these tips to heart. Try keeping your fitness and eating plan healthy and balanced in the New Year. You might even ditch fad diets or weight loss schemes for good. Now that's a resolution worth keeping.

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SOURCES: Olivia H. Beckman, MD, medical director, Walden Behavioral Care, Waltham, Mass. Susan Mitchell, PhD, RD, FADA, consultant to the 5 A Day the Color Way program, Orlando, Fla.

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