

## 14 Stress-Free Ways to Kick Weight Loss in the Butt

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Habit is habit and not to be flung out of the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time. - **Mark Twain**

Let's be honest: Losing weight isn't the easiest thing in the world. All our best intentions end up doing nothing.

And I've tried just about every diet plan out there, from the various low-carb diets to Weight Watchers (which isn't bad, actually) to the Abs Diet to Slim Fast to low-calorie to low-fat and more. I've tried a bunch of exercise programs too, believe me.

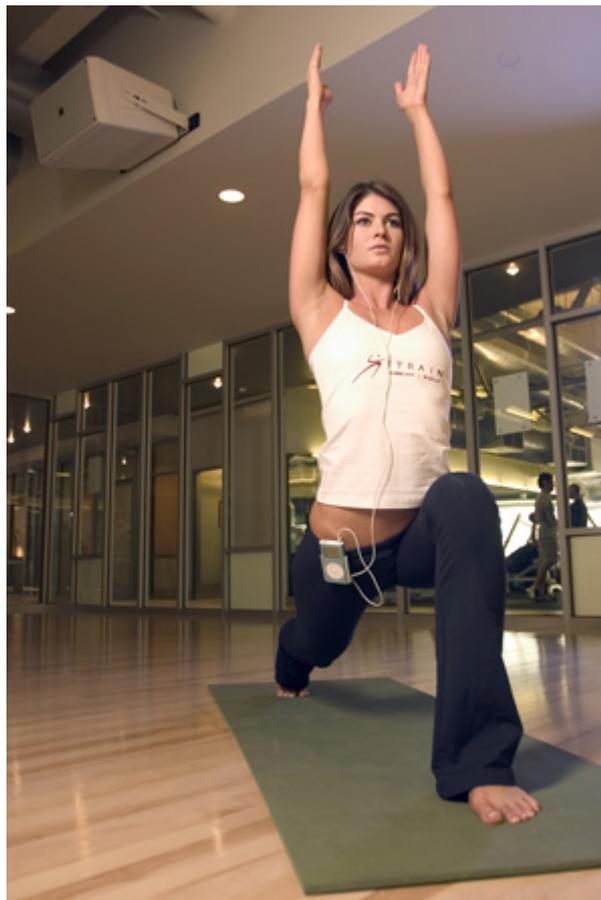


Photo by [Daily Colonial](#)

My weight-loss efforts these last couple of years have been hit-and-miss, as I've struggled to find something that works for me. Recently, I think I've been hitting upon some pretty simple concepts that really work, for me at least.

You might have read the [Zen Habits Meal Plan](#), which is actually a pretty good plan. But let me take some of those concepts and simplify them a little more, for some (almost) easy ways to beat your weight-loss struggles. These are mostly the same concepts, but I'm reporting what has been working for me as I experiment with the meal plan.

Let me be honest again: even with the concepts below, weight loss isn't going to be easy. But at least these tools will make it a little easier, a little simpler, and they really do work.

I've lost 15 pounds in the last few months, which isn't rapid weight loss but is actually a very healthy rate of loss. I recommend gradual weight loss for everyone. At the rate I'm going, you can lose 50 pounds a year. I don't need to lose 50 pounds anymore (I did at one time, but only have about 20 pounds to go), but after I lose the rest of the unwanted bodyfat, I'm going to focus more on building a little muscle (something I'm actually doing now but it's not my main focus).

Never eat more than you can lift. - **Miss Piggy**

**1. Focus on gradual loss.** I mentioned this above, but it's important. Too many people focus on trying to lose weight fast — 10 pounds in 4 weeks, 20 pounds in 2 months, etc. It's not healthy, and it doesn't work, because even if you are able to lose that much weight that fast, you haven't learned sustainable eating habits that will last you a lifetime. The key is to figure out an eating pattern that will work for you for the rest of your life. Again, if you focus on losing 1-2 pounds per week, you will lose between 50-100 pounds per year. You just have to be willing to wait a year, but trust me, a year goes by pretty fast these days (I think it's inflation or something).

**2. Focus on nutrition.** Exercise is important. You have to do it. It has wonderful benefits. But if your focus is on weight loss, the most important factor is what you eat. Don't ignore exercise, by any means, but if you focus on exercise and think you can eat whatever you want, you're wrong. You have to focus on nutrition (what you eat) and use exercise as a way to supplement the calorie burn and to get your body looking how you want it to look (not to mention as a key way to get healthy and feel great).

The reason: you can change how many calories you take in to a much greater degree than you can change how many calories you burn. Thirty minutes of exercise, for example, can burn less than a medium McDonald's fries. Lose the fries, and you've done in a few seconds what would take 30 minutes of exercise to accomplish.

**3. Become aware of your hunger.** This is one of the key things I've been learning. Many times we are not conscious of how hungry we are. We ignore our bodies because we're too busy thinking about other things. As a result, we only eat when we're famished, and that's not a good time to eat, because you don't make healthy eating decisions when you're super hungry. Your blood-sugar level is too low, and your body just wants a quick sugar fix — a donut or some cookies or white bread or a Coke will be much more appealing than a salad or healthy sandwich on whole grain bread.

Learn to listen to your body, and be aware of your hunger when it's in its early stages. This is a key skill to weight loss, something the other plans don't tell you about. They tell you what to eat and when, but don't teach you how to use your body's signals to learn to eat healthier.

**4. Eat when you're hungry, not famished.** When you first feel the hunger, that's when to eat. Don't put it off until the hunger builds into an insatiable monster. When you start to get a little hungry, eat a snack. You don't need to eat a full-on meal ... just some fruit, some crackers, maybe some low-fat dairy (cheese or yogurt or cottage cheese — although I prefer soy yogurt), oatmeal, some nuts, dried fruit, etc. Just something to tide you over until you feel hungry again, or until you can eat a bigger meal. Keep healthy snacks at your desk or in your car or wherever you go. I like to pack some in the morning.

The corollary to this is to also allow yourself to eat what you crave. I know this is contrary to most advice, but I've found that it's important to listen to your body ... not only when your body is hungry, but when your body is craving a specific food. I've also found that often your body just wants a taste of that food (see No. 13 below) and if you give your body what it wants, and really pay attention to the taste and texture of the food and how you feel after you eat it, you will probably crave that food less and less.

**5. Learn to eat until satiated.** Again, pay attention to your body as you eat. If you eat mindlessly, you will most likely overeat. You'll just keep cramming food into yourself until you've eaten too much. We've all felt the pain of being overstuffed. Don't allow that to happen — be mindful of your eating, and of your hunger.

A good habit to build is to eat slowly ... and take pauses, so you can think about whether you're really still hungry ... and drink lots of water during those pauses. This style of eating will allow you to stop eating when you're satiated (when your hunger is satisfied, not when you're stuffed) and allow you to be satiated by eating less. It's not easy at first, but once you've practiced it for a week or two, it will make a huge difference in the amount you eat.

Another thing: before you go back for seconds, stop and take a break for a few minutes. Drink some water, talk to somebody, read, go do something, clean the kitchen a little. Whatever it takes. Often you'll find that you really didn't need the seconds. And then you've saved yourself a few hundred calories.

**6. Drink lots of water.** I mentioned this above, but drinking water throughout the day helps you to eat less.

Water takes the place of food in your stomach. You'll still need to eat, but if you stay hydrated you'll get hungry less. Keep a bottle of water with you at all times.

**7. Keep healthy options available.** A good trick is to clear your fridge and cabinets of all unhealthy snacks and foods. Just dump them. Then plan some healthy breakfasts, lunches, dinners, snacks, and go shopping. Bring healthy foods to work and wherever you go. Always have some fruits and nuts and other healthy options by your side. If you do this, and eat when you're hungry, you'll eat the unhealthy stuff much, much less.

**8. You gotta log.** This may sound difficult to those of you who hate to log stuff or who only do it for a couple days and then stop ... but it's really not that hard once you get used to it. And if you use a very easy log (and one that's accountable — see next item), it's even easier. The reason you need to log is because most people underestimate the amount of calories they're taking in. They don't think the sweet drinks or the little snacks make any difference, but they really add up. Log everything that goes into your mouth, and you'll really see how much you're taking in. The act of logging makes you more aware, and that awareness, that mindfulness, is what allows you to eat less and be healthier.

**9. Be accountable.** Perhaps the greatest motivator of all is allowing others to see your log. That's why I like using [PeerTrainer](#), although other good logs (such as [Fit Day](#), [Spark People](#), [Calorie Count](#), etc.) can also be used this way. PeerTrainer allows a small group of people to log easily and take a look at the other logs in the group. Whatever tool you use, get a partner or a small group that monitors each other's logs, and you'll be very motivated to eat well and exercise.

**10. Find a workout partner.** This is accountability done right. A good workout partner is someone who wants to workout at the same time as you and do a similar workout, and someone whose company you enjoy. Why it works: if you set an appointment with a workout partner, you won't want to miss it. You'll make sure you're there, unlike when you work out by yourself — many people are very tempted just to cancel their workouts if they're a little tired or busy. Also, a workout partner makes the workout a little more fun, and that's always a good thing. If you get a workout partner, you will have a stress-free exercise plan that will compliment your healthy eating perfectly. Try for 3-5 workouts per week, giving yourself plenty of rest time after hard workouts.

**11. Allow yourself to cheat.** A strict diet plan is a bad one. If you are severely restricting yourself, and you feel deprived of good foods, you won't last long. Trust me, I've tried it many times. Instead, relax a little bit, giving yourself a cheat meal or two each week, and allowing yourself to cheat a little on special occasions. It's still best if you can go for the healthier foods on special occasions, but don't be too strict.

**12. Three-bite rule.** A great way to allow for cheats is the Three-bite rule ... basically, if you want a sweet or some other sinful food, don't deny yourself ... allow yourself a little indulgence, but just three bites. Allow yourself to enjoy the taste, eat slowly, then move on to healthier foods.

**13. Forgive, and move on.** If you make a mistake, or cheat more than you should, don't just give up or beat yourself up. This kind of negative thinking is why people don't stay on diets for long. They binge and then go back to their unhealthy habits. Instead, just forgive yourself for any indulgences, and get back on your healthy eating plan. Look forward, not backward.

**14. Get inspired.** Motivation is important ... maybe the most important thing. Accountability (mentioned above) is the best motivator ... but I'd put inspiration at a close second. Find others who are doing what you want to do, read success stories, read magazines and blogs and books, put up a motivational poster ... whatever it takes to get inspired.

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