

PART 4

Create a Helpful Environment

This section begins with a closer look at changing habits. Many of your actions each day—if not most of them—are controlled by habits. In times of stress or other times when your goals are not a top priority, you are likely to go back to old habits. Thus, establishing healthy habits is important for long-term success.

Your environment cues many behaviors. This section will help you set up your environment to be helpful.

- **Physical Environment.** This includes your kitchen, dining area, desk drawer, and other places you store and eat food.
- **Social Environment.** This includes the people around you, people important to you (near and far), and social media. This section will also help you talk to others about your goals.
- **Mental Environment.** This includes the things you say to yourself. This also includes changing the unhelpful thoughts that get in the way of taking action.

Build on Your *Current* Habits

Your day-to-day activities include hundreds of habits. Some may be second nature or automatic, like reaching for your seatbelt when you get in a car. Some may be weaker and subject to change, like including fruits or vegetables with your meals and snacks. Be patient. It can take several weeks to form a new habit.

As you went through Parts 1 to 3 of this guide, you may have noticed differences between your habits and the healthy ones suggested. As you start to make changes, first focus on a habit that you do every day. Or, think of a habit that you do many times a day. Changes to everyday habits are going to make a big difference, as they are repeated more.

Using the examples below, compare the impact of making changes to occasional habits versus making changes to everyday habits.

Example A: Change an occasional habit, such as choosing healthy snacks at the airport.

Change an occasional habit ➔ Small effect on overall lifestyle. The behavior is done a few times.

Example B: Change an everyday habit, such as having a glass of water with meals and snacks.

Change an everyday habit ➔ Large effect on overall lifestyle. The healthy behavior is repeated many times. Focus on changing these types of habits.

Breaking old habits is not easy. It takes more than willpower. It takes a plan.

Keep Habits Rewarding

When you are rewarded for an action, you are more likely to repeat it. If you eat a piece of chocolate and enjoy the taste and how you feel afterwards, you are probably going to eat chocolate again.

Managing your weight does not mean giving up rewarding feelings. If it did, it would be VERY hard for you to stick with it. People are wired to seek rewards and to stick to habits that give rewards. There are two types of rewards:

Intrinsic Rewards	Extrinsic Rewards
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Something intangible (you can't touch it)• Arise from within you• Examples: a feeling or emotion, such as joy, pride, or satisfaction• Feeling like you are living your values• Are strong motivators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Something tangible (you can touch it)• Are physically received from someone else• Examples: money, a trophy• Get weaker over time

Your habit change plan starts with two basic questions:

1. What is the reward for my current habit?
2. How can I still get the reward with a healthier habit? You may need to learn a new skill, such as time management. Or, you may need help from others.

Example: My morning habit of rushing out the door with a cup of coffee—no breakfast—helps me be on time for work. Every time I am on time for work, I feel relieved and proud of myself. (Feeling relieved and proud is the reward for being on time for work.)

Ideas to Keep Rewards: I could make a breakfast-to-go snack the night before and keep it next to my coffee maker. Or, I could wake up earlier to prepare a breakfast. Or, I could keep a breakfast snack at work to have once I get there.

Plan to Keep Rewards:

Pick a habit that is part of your everyday routine and that you want to change.

Habit:

Planning Step 1: What is the reward for this habit?

Planning Step 2: How can I still get the reward with a healthier habit?

Try this again for another habit.

Habit:

Planning Step 1: What is the reward for this habit?

Planning Step 2: How can I still get the reward with a healthier habit?

Use this tool often to change how you think about adopting healthy habits.

Make Your Kitchen a Healthy Eating Zone

You walk into the kitchen and see a box of cereal sitting out. You fill your cereal bowl and eye the leftover pie next to a bag of chips on the counter. It’s been a long day and you deserve a treat, right? When you are hungry, tired, bored, or stressed, food choices can be influenced by what is around you.

First, learn about your kitchen.

How many times do you walk into your kitchen each day?
If you aren't sure, keep track for a day. Write your answer in the box to the left.

Your kitchen may be a place where you socialize with family and friends. It may be a place where you cook or pack lunches for children. Or, you have to walk through the kitchen to get to other rooms.

List a few reasons you go into your kitchen:

Without opening any doors (pantry, fridge, etc.), what foods can you see?

The kitchen can be one of your biggest allies in managing your weight. A kitchen can also be a battle zone that trips up your goals.

Open your refrigerator and write down the first 5 items you see.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Now look for 5 healthy items (e.g., vegetables, fruit, string cheese, low-sugar yogurt, or hummus). Write them here. Place a check in the box to the right if that food is in a clear container or can be seen easily (like a bowl of grapes).

	In a clear container/ easily visible
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you were to select a snack right now, what would you choose?

Why did you choose this snack?

Help Your Refrigerator Help You

Look at what you wrote in the box on the bottom of the previous page. Maybe you wrote “taste” or “quick and easy.” Once foods are right in front of you, it is harder to make a choice based on what your body needs. Instead, you are likely to choose foods based on these factors:

- If you can see it
- Color
- How fresh you think it is
- What you think it tastes like
- If you’ve thought about the food earlier or the reward you will get from having the food

Tips for a Weight-Friendly Fridge	I do this now!	When I will try this:
Store chopped veggies and fruits on the middle shelf at eye-level. Use clear glass or plastic containers.		
Put less-healthy leftovers in the crisper or behind healthier options. Store healthy leftovers in clear containers or with clear plastic wrap.		
Avoid washing fruit (especially berries) until you are ready to eat (moisture invites mold).		
Wrap cake, pizza, and other less healthy leftovers in aluminum foil or use solid-colored containers.		
Use the produce drawer to hide sweets and less-healthy foods.		
Put washed grapes or cherry tomatoes in a colander. Put this on a plate to allow liquid to drain.		
Keep hard-boiled eggs, string cheese, grilled turkey burger patties, and non-fat or Greek yogurts in front for easy, high-protein snacks.		
Keep all un-opened sodas and sugar-sweetened drinks out of the fridge. Out of sight, out of mind!		

Plan Your Refrigerator Layout

Use the empty refrigerator below to plan where you are going to place healthy foods. Plan, too, where you are going to place less healthy foods. Draw pictures or write words in each section. Use specific examples of foods you already have or that you plan to buy. Or, draw a picture of your own fridge to match your layout.

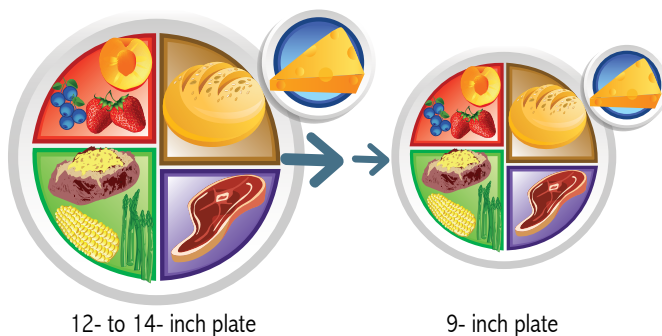


Join the Team: The Rest of Your Kitchen

Avoid going to battle every day with unhealthy choices. Learn your own strengths and weaknesses. If you are more likely to chop veggies after shopping than after coming home from work, do this after shopping and store in clear containers. If having visible candy is tempting, keep it in a tin in the basement, out of sight and inconvenient.

Dish Cupboards	I do this now!	When I will try this:
Stock small bowls and plates on easy-to-reach shelves. Put large plates and bowls in a hard-to-reach place or in another closet in the house.		
Put smaller wine glasses in front of larger ones. Use tall, narrow glasses for non-water drinks.		
Make it easier to cook. Have a blender on the counter and organize your pots and pans to make it easy to pull out a frying pan or pot.		

Use a smaller plate (9-10 inches) and downsize your cereal bowl. This helps reduce portion sizes, even if what is on your plate has not changed.



12- to 14- inch plate

9- inch plate



Use dessert forks, appetizer forks, or child-sized utensils to eat your meals. This will help you take smaller bites and eat slower. You may find you feel full before you've finished your meal! You may also be satisfied with less.

Counter Tops & Kitchen Space	I do this now!	When I will try this:
Add a fruit bowl to the counter with two or more fruits. Tomatoes can go in here too! Roma tomatoes can make for a refreshing, convenient, and filling snack!		
Organize counter tops and decrease kitchen clutter—even on the refrigerator door.		
Take out the lounge factor—no TV, tablets, comfy chairs, etc. Spending extra time in the kitchen could lead to munching and eating when you are not hungry.		
Don't sit down to a meal unless it includes a fruit or vegetable.		

Pantry	I do this now!	When I will try this:
Keep healthy choices at eye level—oatmeal, quinoa, nut butters, beans, canned fruit in water or juice, whole grain pasta, rice, etc.		
Move foods you want to eat less of to a less convenient location (like in a cupboard you need a stool to reach) or to a different place in the house where you do not go as often (like the basement or laundry room).		
Store packaged, processed foods in solid-colored bins in a closed pantry or closet.		

***Make less healthy foods less visible and harder to reach.
Make healthy foods more visible and easier to reach.***



Now Go! Take a Look

Is there food sitting out in the open in your kitchen?
If so, what is visible (e.g., bags of chips or boxes of cereal on top of the fridge, bowl of fruit on the table)?

Where do you keep “treat” foods (desserts, sweet snacks, chips, etc.)?

How quickly can you reach for these? Is it easy?

Where else can you store highly processed snacks and high-sugar treats?
If options are limited, put them in a solid-colored plastic container or put them on a shelf that is not at eye level. These changes might help everyone else in your household too!

**When you drink water, do you prefer filtered, chilled water, or tap water?
Is your preferred water easily accessible?**

Alter Your Eating Cues

Eating cues are things that prompt you to eat. They come from links your brain has made between eating and other events. When done over and over again, the event itself triggers eating. Some examples of events that trigger eating are listed in the chart below. Place a check (✓) next to cues that apply to you.

	Cue	Eating
<input type="checkbox"/>	Morning coffee breaks	Doughnuts, sweet rolls
<input type="checkbox"/>	Watching football on TV	Potato chips, beer
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shopping at the mall	Big cookies, soft pretzels, soda, specialty coffee
<input type="checkbox"/>	Going to a movie	Buttered popcorn, soda, candy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Going out to celebrate	Large meals, desserts, alcoholic beverages
<input type="checkbox"/>	Attending sporting events	Beer, hot dogs, nachos with cheese, peanuts

Focus on triggers that you face most often and that lead you to eat foods high in added sugar, saturated fat, and/or sodium.

Cue	What I Eat

It is possible to break these links. The more you practice a new behavior, the stronger it becomes. You may want to replace eating with a non-eating behavior. Or, you may want to practice choosing a healthier food or drink at that time.

Ways to Alter Eating Cues

Place a check (✓) next to the strategies you use now. Or, write in the last column when you plan to try this strategy (e.g., next weekend at the baseball game).

Strategy	I do this now!	When I will try this:
Eat a snack before going somewhere (including out to eat).		
If allowed, bring your own healthy snack.		
Bring or buy a “fun-sized” or small portion of the treat you are craving (if available).		
Eat meals and snacks in one specified place at home, such as the kitchen or dining room table.		
Never eat while standing—always be seated.		
Do no other activity, such as watching TV, while eating.		
Try to eat meals at the same time each day.		
Take along bottled water and high fiber snacks to places that trigger high-calorie drinking and eating.		
Take a walk break instead of a morning coffee break.		
Avoid walking by places that tempt you to eat while you shop.		
Go to places, be with people and/or do things not associated with eating.		
Take longer to eat a meal.		
Use utensils to eat.		
Put your fork or spoon down between bites.		
Chew & swallow each bite before taking another one.		
Take sips of water between bites.		
Split a meal or snack with someone else.		

Scramble Your Daily Behaviors

Changing how you go about your day can help get rid of eating cues and prepare you to establish new, healthy habits. Examples:

- Change the order of morning events: get up, shower, brush hair, eat breakfast, brush teeth, read paper, walk dog.
- Change the order of work events: take off coat, talk with co-workers, organize desk, review appointments or assignments, open email, make calls.
- Alter driving routine: wear gloves, turn on/off radio, raise/lower volume, try listening to a new station, open/close windows, take a new route to work.
- Develop new telephone behavior. Stand instead of sit, hold phone with your opposite hand to your opposite ear, talk in a different room, walk as you talk.

My ideas:	When I will try this change:

Be realistic. Allow time to establish a new habit. Some new habits are picked up quickly. Others may take several weeks or months of practice.

Be consistent. Practice your new behaviors every day. This is how your new behavior will become a reliable habit.

The “Everything in Moderation” Trap

This may be the most common dietary advice today: everything in moderation. However, there are many reasons why this is really hard for most people and downright dangerous for others.



1. May Be Dangerous

Certain ingredients may harm your body or could make managing a medical condition difficult. Or, you may be sensitive to a food that leads to discomfort, like an artificial sweetener triggering a headache. Moderation does not work in this case.

2. Risk of Overeating

Second, moderation is a very vague term. How often are you having this food in “moderation”? A small amount daily? A large amount once weekly? Even what you think is a small amount may actually take up a large portion of your daily calorie budget. Also, having this small amount could lead to overeating, especially if the food is high in sugar.

3. Negotiation Trap

Eating foods in moderation can lead to negotiations and planning to “make up for it” later. “If I eat this cake tonight, I’ll run an extra mile tomorrow.” “If I go out drinking this weekend, I won’t have any alcohol next weekend.” It seems easy in the moment to seize instant gratification. However, if you use the “everything in moderation” excuse too often, you may find yourself negotiating your health away.

When “Just a Little” Doesn’t Work

Sugar, fat, certain chemicals, and other parts of foods can trigger addiction responses in the brain. Once this desire for additional rewards is activated, it can be very difficult to stick with your healthy goals.

Fill in the blank: Once I start eating _____, it is difficult for me to stop eating it or to not overeat.

- If you have this food in your house, keep it hidden and in an inconvenient location (like a closet or in the basement).
- If possible, avoid places and store aisles that sell this item.
- Try to understand why you have this craving. Is it due to stress, boredom, or another emotion? Read more in Part 6 on tackling emotional eating.
- Only eat this item around people who have healthy habits. You may find yourself less likely to binge on a food if others around you are eating healthy portions.
- If you do buy a trigger food, buy the smallest amount you can.
 - A small, single-serving bag of chips may keep you from buying the large, family-size bag and eating too many chips.
 - If you buy a larger bag, portion the contents into smaller bags as soon as you can.
 - Get a child-size or small fountain drink to satisfy a craving for soda. Re-fill your cup with water immediately and sip until your craving goes away.



Make Unhealthy Habits Less Convenient

To help make your *healthy* habits easier, make doing your *unhealthy* habits harder or unpleasant. Make healthy choices pleasant and convenient.

Ways to Make Unhealthy Habits Unpleasant and Inconvenient

- Sit in an uncomfortable chair when having an unhealthy food or drink. Don't sit on the couch to eat.
- Keep unhealthy foods and drinks in the basement, the laundry room, or a closet. Don't keep these foods in the kitchen or in easy sight.
- Eat foods with the wrong utensil (e.g., try eating a pizza with a spoon).
- Set the volume on the TV very low as a cue to do something active. If you turn up the volume and watch, turn the volume back down before turning the TV off. The reminder will be there for you next time.
- Hide the TV remote in a drawer or on top of a book case.

How can you make an unhealthy habit unpleasant and inconvenient?

Ways to Make Healthy Habits Pleasant & Convenient:

- Wear new workout clothes—even new socks can make an experience more fun!
- Listen to your favorite music while exercising or eating a healthy snack.
- Add fresh flowers to the table when you serve a healthy meal.

How can you make a healthy habit pleasant and convenient?

Take small steps toward a new habit

Before you start this section, make copies of these pages. This way you can use the prompts to change additional habits.

1. List one unhealthy eating habit you want to change. Make sure the change is something you want to do, not something you are doing just to please someone else. Be specific.

2. Make a list of the reasons you want to do this. Read this list often. For extra support: use a sticky note or index card and post this list where the unhealthy eating habit takes place.

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3. Write a positive statement about yourself or an encouraging message on a sticky note or an index card. Post this where you will see it, such as on a refrigerator or bathroom mirror.

4. Working backwards from your goal, write a series of steps you can take to get there. Make the first step something you feel ready to do today. As soon as you take each step, set a time goal for taking the next step.

End goal:

My first step (today):

My next step:

My next step:

My next step/reaching my goal:

Example end goal: I want to plan a week of meals in advance.

My first step (today): Write down a plan for what I am going to eat tomorrow. Make sure my plan meets, but doesn't go over, my goals for each food group.

My next step: Before I go grocery shopping, I will write out a menu for the next 3 days and use this menu to create my shopping list.

My next step: Repeat this process for two weeks, increasing how many days I plan ahead.

My next step/reaching my goal: Write a menu for a full week that matches my goals. Use this menu to create a shopping list.

It can be tempting to break a goal into so many steps that it takes a very long time to make any changes. It is normal to not want to fail. However, if you stretch a change out too long, you risk losing motivation.

If you are taking steps that seem easy, try taking a little bigger step. You may find you are able to do more at once than you thought! If that bigger step is too hard, try again or go back to the smaller step. Keep going.

5. Reflect on your success or any challenges you experienced.

A. How easy/hard was it to make this change?

B. What changes did you have to make to your steps as you went along?

6. Reward yourself for small steps.

A. Pay attention to any rewarding thoughts or feelings that occur, such as feeling more confident or more organized.

B. Notice any physical feelings, such as having more energy or sleeping better at night.

C. Take time to reflect on one of your values statements. How has taking these steps allowed you to show yourself and others what you value?

D. Treat yourself with non-food rewards, such as a new book, fresh flowers, or new music. Reflect on the intrinsic rewards of your changes.

It Takes a Village

Build support around you. Support from others can help:

- Motivate you and lift you up when you stumble.
- Hold you accountable.
- Give you new ideas and inspiration.
- Make activities more fun.

Start With One Person

Find someone you know and trust. This could be anybody—a family member, friend, or coworker. Perhaps this person already motivates you to make positive changes in your life.

1. Let them know what you are trying to do.
2. Ask them if they would be willing to support you.
3. If “yes”, say “thank you!”
4. Let them know how to help you. This may change over time.
5. Thank this person often. Let them know the impact they are having on your lifestyle change.

Let Others Know How to Help You

Even when someone wants to help you, they may not know how. You have probably experienced this already, like when someone gives you cliché advice or gives you a sweet treat to cheer you up.

Be specific when you tell others how to help you. Here are a few ideas. Put a star (*) next to the ideas you could share with your support buddy.

- Remind you of your strengths and talents.
- Share healthy recipes for easy meals and snacks.
- Plan social times that don’t involve food. For example, go for a walk or go to the same exercise class.
- Give you non-food gifts only.
- Take care of your children so you can do your planned exercise.
Or, plan an event where your families can be active together.

Build Support at Home

Talk to the people you live with about what you are doing. Let them know why you are making these changes. Ask for their support and say “thank you” for things they do that help you.

- Set food rules for everyone in the family to follow. This may include eating together at the table and keeping the TV off. Keep phones in another room.
- Keep unhealthy snacks in dark containers, out of plain sight.
- Encourage positive talk about new meals and snacks in the house. If a new food is disliked, talk about why. A food can be prepared in a different way.
- Involve others in meal planning, especially if everyone will be eating the same meals.
- Prepare meals together. Adults and children can learn valuable lessons in the kitchen, from math skills to building self-confidence.
- Be active together. Make this time more about shared family joys than weight loss. Stretch together in the morning or go for a walk after dinner. Plan family picnics that involve a hike or bike ride.

How can you build support at home this week?

What is one way you can be physically active with your family this week?

Build Support at Work

- Find out about your company's wellness program.
 - Participate in challenges, such as a step contest, offered through your wellness program. There may be rewards for participation or winning the challenge.
 - Join the wellness committee and participate in surveys that give you a chance to share your opinion. Let your company know what policies will help you be healthy. Your employer wants you to be healthy, as this helps their health care costs and helps you be productive at work.
 - Volunteer to be a wellness champion. Sharing your journey with others may help give your goals a bigger purpose.
- Organize walk times with coworkers at work. If you can, spend part of your lunch break going for a walk around the building or outside.
- If you are going out to eat with coworkers, suggest you go somewhere that offers healthy options.
- Celebrations at work should include healthy options and limit unhealthy options. Encourage the person who organizes these events to make healthier options available.
- Split meal prep with a coworker. Bring a healthy lunch or snack to share for the first half of the week. For the second half of the week, your coworker brings a healthy lunch or snack to share.

How can you build support at work this week?

How can you support the wellness of a coworker?

Use Social Media for Support

Today's social world goes beyond the people you see on a daily basis. From Facebook to Twitter, Instagram to Snapchat, social media may be a big part of your life. Perhaps you follow friends, family, sports and entertainment personalities, or online groups and message boards.

Social media can be a powerful, positive part of your healthy lifestyle change. What you read, see, and hear can affect your mood, knowledge, what you think is normal, and how you feel about yourself. It can also be negative and make it harder for you to reach your goals.

Positive ways to use social media:

- Follow friends, nutritionists, and food bloggers who promote positive, healthy body and mind messages.
- Un-follow or block individuals who tend to post negative comments or who engage in arguments on social media.
- Share what inspires and motivates you on social media.
- Instead of reading or listening to short clips of news, read more investigative and thorough articles that make you think. Use this as food for thought on your next walk or in a discussion.
- Explore websites that bring people who share a common interest together. Join an outdoor adventure club or social group on MeetUp! (www.meetup.com).
- Support your friends and family who you see working to make changes in their lives, whether in health or another area of life.
- Follow friends, bloggers, or magazines that share ideas for meals, snacks, or workouts.
- Share what challenges you face and ask for support from friends & family.
- Share your goals to improve accountability.

* *Note how much time you spend on social media sites. Could this time be spent planning a grocery list, going for a quick walk, or getting to bed earlier?*

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Follow & Subscribe

Tune into positive influencers on social media. Subscribe to recipe-packed magazines and blogs. Find new information, colorful ideas, and inspiring people to help you stay motivated and find social support.

Magazines (and corresponding websites):

- Clean Eating (www.cleaneating.com)
- Eating Well (www.eatingwell.com)
- Cooking Light (www.cookinglight.com)
- Vegetarian Times (even if you're not a vegetarian, this magazine provides great veggie-based meal and snack ideas!) (www.vegetariantimes.com)
- Experience Life (www.experiencelifemag.com)

Blogs & Social Media Accounts

Find a great list of top fitness and food blogs here:
<http://greatist.com/health/must-read-health-fitness-blogs>

Pinterest (www.pinterest.com) – Think of Pinterest as a picture-book guide to meal plans, recipes, printables, workout ideas, and inspiration. This site offers much more than tips for healthy eating, but here are some search terms to get you started: “clean eating” “healthy recipes” “healthy (food item, like stir fry or quiche)” or “easy workouts.”

@SproutedKitchen (Twitter, Instagram) and www.sproutedkitchen.com – Whole foods inspiration and recipes

@Veggieful (Twitter, Instagram) – Ideas for incorporating more fiber-rich, plant-based foods into your diet

@Skinnytaste (Twitter, Instagram) and www.skinnytaste.com – A healthy take on many easy, familiar recipes

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Filter Your Social Media

Who or what do I want to start following?

Who or what do I need to stop following?

How can I reduce the time I spend on social media?

Comparing Yourself to Others

Avoid physical comparisons with others. You will never look exactly like someone else. Instead, look at the qualities you admire in others.

Who is someone I admire? What values does this person show by their actions? Underline the values you want to have yourself (e.g., sense of adventure).

What actions can I take to start living one of those values?

When Support Isn't Supportive

Not everyone may be happy you are trying to lose weight. What you are eating may not be what they are eating. Or, they may feel attention is being placed on their own unhealthy habits.

Be careful how many times you bring up your efforts to manage your weight and change your eating habits. Avoid making others feel guilty for their choices. Everyone has their own goals and struggles.

People may say and do things that make it difficult for you to stick to your plan. There are positive ways to respond to this that won't leave you feeling stressed or guilty. Stress and guilt make it harder to digest food.

Check (✓) the statements or situations below that you have heard before (or something like it). Think about how you have responded in the past.

- ☐ "One piece of chocolate cake won't hurt you."
- ☐ "I made it just for you."
- ☐ "What's the matter? Don't you like it?"
- ☐ "I'm really in the mood for pizza. Let's split one!"
- ☐ "You've been on every diet there is. You're not going to succeed on this one either."
- ☐ Someone puts your favorite high-calorie food right in front of you.
- ☐ Someone complains when you serve foods that are healthier than they are used to.
- ☐ Someone asks you to do something during planned physical activity time.
- ☐ "You look great! You don't need to change anything you're doing!"

What are some other unhelpful comments you have received? Write them here.

Be Assertive

Learn the differences between passive, aggressive, and assertive communication.

PASSIVE

- You lack expression for yourself.
- You do not stand up for your rights and needs.

Result: You usually do not achieve your goal.

AGGRESSIVE

- You stand up for your rights and needs, but at the expense of someone else.

Result: You usually put down or hurt someone else. You gain no respect.

ASSERTIVE

- You stand up for your rights and needs without putting down or hurting someone else.
- You express your feelings without becoming victim to them.

Result: You build self-respect and feel good about yourself.

Example: Your aunt offers you a large piece of cherry pie that she said she made especially for you. You know that you have eaten enough for the meal and eating the piece of pie does not fit your eating goals.

Passive Response: "Thank you. It's delicious!" Thinking... "I really don't want to eat this right now, but I don't want to hurt her feelings."

Aggressive Response: "I can't believe you're offering me cherry pie when you know I'm trying to lose weight. You're going to ruin my diet!"

Assertive Response: "I appreciate that you went to the trouble of making this pie for me! It looks great and I'm sure it tastes great. I am very serious about losing weight so I'd like to split that piece with someone."

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What Assertive Looks Like

Body Posture: Be relaxed and natural. Avoid slouching, putting your hands in your pockets, and facing away from the person you are speaking with.

Eye Contact: Good eye contact is vital to convey self-confidence and interest. Don't stare at the other person; this comes across as a challenge.

Voice, Tone, and Quality: Use a strong, varied tone. Speak clearly and firmly. Don't shout or speak too softly. Don't whine.

Distance from the Person: Don't position yourself too far or too close.

Facial Expression: Let your face convey the same message as what you are saying.

Content: Use short sentences. Be specific, clear, and firm.

Practice First

Plan or write down what you want to say. Have responses ready ahead of time to deal with questions and comments. Reinforce your remarks by saying what positive outcomes will occur for you and the other person. Practice in front of a mirror or with a friend.

BENEFITS OF BEING ASSERTIVE

- You can feel comfortable saying "no."
- You have more confidence to ask others for help.
- You gain more respect from others.
- You feel less angry with yourself and with others.
- You feel justified to say what you want to say.
- You feel comfortable requesting clarification.
- You accept compliments graciously.
- You can change your mind without feeling guilty.

Use the L.A.D.D.E.R. Technique

This is a step-by-step way to become more assertive.

L	Look at your needs, wants, rights, and feelings about the situation.
A	Arrange a meeting that is convenient for you and the other person to talk.
D	Define the problem clearly to the other person.
D	Describe your feelings using "I messages." I message statements let you take charge of your feelings.
E	Express your needs and desires in an assertive manner using a few clear sentences. Be aware of your eye contact, hand gestures, posture, voice, and facial expression.
R	Reinforce your remarks by saying what positive outcomes will occur for you and the other person.

Example:

L	I wish my partner would stop stocking the pantry with a food I tend to over-eat when it is available.
A	I'll plan to talk with him or her after dinner tomorrow.
D	Tell your partner, "When cookies are in the pantry, it is hard for me to have just one. I appreciate the treat, but this makes it harder for me to stick with my goal."
D	"I feel I could stick with my goals with your help."
E	"Let's keep cookies off the grocery list. I am starting to enjoy fruit as a sweet treat. Let's get that instead! Also, a hug would be a wonderful treat from you!"
R	"This change would help me to reach my goal. As I lose weight, I am able to do more physical activity comfortably. Let's plan a hike together this weekend!"

Practice Assertiveness

Practice responding to common scenarios. Below are sample responses to a few statements and situations. Write your own assertive response below the example.

“One piece of chocolate cake won’t hurt you.”

You’re right, but a whole cake of pieces will! Since I’m not eating chocolate cake as often, I’ll enjoy a couple of bites with you. -OR- I’m not eating chocolate cake as often. I’ll have a piece another time.

My response:

“I made it just for you.”

Wow, I really appreciate you thinking of me! I’m cutting back on how much I eat that treat right now. Can I have just a taste?

My response:

“What’s the matter? Don’t you like it?”

I am enjoying it, but since I’m changing how I eat, I’m eating the amount that’s just right for me.

My response:

“You’ve been on every diet there is. This one won’t work either.”

I appreciate your concern for my success, but this time my goal is a healthy lifestyle change and the weight loss is secondary. I’m doing things differently this time.

My response:

Someone takes you on a “surprise” trip to the ice cream parlor.

What a surprise! I’m going to enjoy a kiddie-size ice cream. Next time, maybe we could go for a walk, go someplace different, etc.

My response:

Someone asks you to do something during planned physical activity time.

Thanks for the invite, but I have plans to go to the gym today. How about we take a look at our schedules and find a time that works for both of us to do something in the future. Or, would you like to join me?

My response:

You look great! You don’t need to change anything you’re doing!

Thanks for the compliment! But, I want to look and FEEL my best so it’s important for me to keep implementing healthier lifestyle choices for myself.

My response:

Face Unsupportive Situations

Apply the suggestions in the table below to your challenges. Not all strategies will be right for all scenarios. You can turn a negative situation into a positive one for everyone. Add your own ideas at the bottom.

Tip	Situation I can apply this to:
Let others know what your goals are and why you are working to achieve them.	
Model trying new foods and being open to new tastes.	
Reduce the amount of time spent with negative people, if possible.	
Describe your efforts as a lifestyle change rather than a diet.	
Share how you are doing things differently this time if you have struggled in the past.	
Let supportive people know how much their support means to you. Send a sincere thank you card, email, or share a kind word in person. They will likely help you again.	
Enjoy treats every now and then. Plan to have a small amount. Don't let guilt rob you of enjoying the treat!	
My idea:	
My idea:	

Say Nice Things to Yourself

These nice things are called affirmations. What you say to yourself is powerful. You may not strongly believe it at first, but keep going.

1. State your affirmation in the present tense.
2. Say what you want, rather than what you don't want.
3. Include feeling words that add positive emotion.
4. Be specific about what you want, rather than being vague.
5. Make the words simple and easy to remember.

Here are a few ideas.

I am special and unique.	I am proud to be me.
I take care of my body.	I trust myself.
I am thankful for my life.	I love to play and have fun.
I am a good friend.	I love to learn.
I am courageous.	I am lovable.
I am gentle and strong.	I am learning from this experience.
I choose to respect myself.	I choose to be in control.
I am in control of many things, but not all things.	

Write an affirmation here, using the tips and examples above.

START TODAY. Choose one or two affirmations. Write this statement on a sticky note and put it where you will see it, like the bathroom mirror or on your computer monitor. Say it out loud or repeat it silently to yourself.

The Poisoned Parrot

Imagine you have a parrot. This parrot repeats everything you say about yourself, over and over again. It comments on your life, especially the things that go wrong.

For example, you come home with several bags of treats and soda. The parrot squawks, “There you go again. You’re never going to lose weight. You could have made a list, but you didn’t. You keep saying you’re going to change, but you aren’t. You’re never going to change your habits.”

How do you feel? How long would you put up with this parrot? Don’t put up with a bully in your head. Notice this “parrot” and cover the cage.



Dispute Unhelpful Thoughts

Thinking in all-or-nothing terms using words like “always,” “never,” and “every” can make it difficult to see options. Avoid thinking about people or situations using absolute terms. Logical thinking looks at more than one option. People can act in different ways. Situations can have many outcomes.

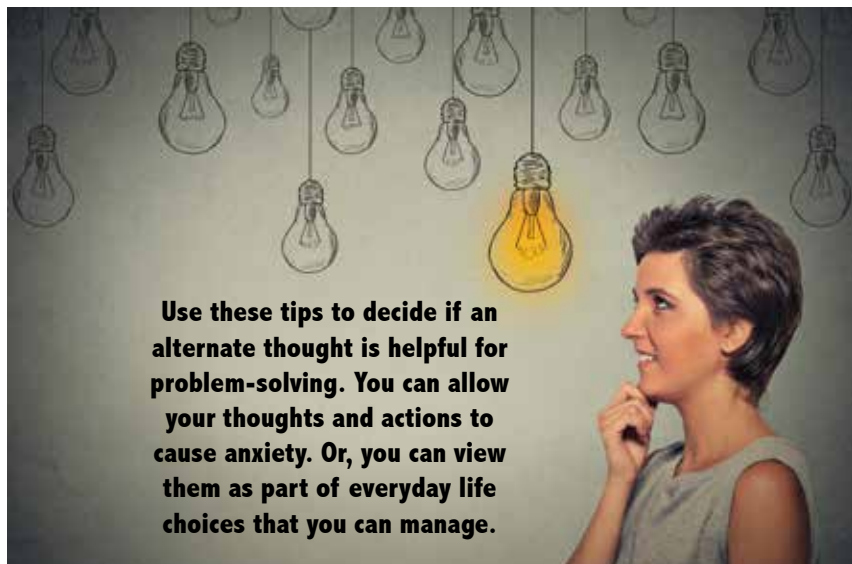


Check (✓) the unhelpful thoughts below that you have had.

- ☐ Gaining weight and moving less is just part of getting older.
- ☐ Taking care of myself is selfish.
- ☐ I weigh less than those around me. At least I am doing better than they are.
- ☐ My spouse does the grocery shopping and cooking so I have very little control over what I eat.
- ☐ Eating healthy is too expensive.

Question your unhelpful thoughts. The strategies on the following pages help to break down thoughts that you may be using as excuses not to change. If you notice you are thinking in absolutes, identify alternatives to your black and white thoughts.

Tips for Rational Thinking



Use these tips to decide if an alternate thought is helpful for problem-solving. You can allow your thoughts and actions to cause anxiety. Or, you can view them as part of everyday life choices that you can manage.

1. Ask: Is your thought based on facts?
2. Identify what you are trying to do. Know your purpose.
3. Consider many different outcomes and their effects.
4. View the situation from many perspectives.
5. Don't assume a situation will have the same outcome as it did in the past.
6. Have good evidence for a generalization before you make it.
7. Avoid assuming one event caused another just because they happened at the same time.

Banish Black & White Thoughts

Use the boxes below to consider a thought that you tend to see as black and white. Consider some alternative thoughts or ideas you could have instead. Or, when one comes to mind, return to this page and complete the following chart to practice banishing black and white thinking.

Black & White Thought	Alternative Thoughts
<i>Example: I can't go to restaurants because I always overeat and ignore my healthy goals.</i>	<i>I can choose restaurants that have healthy choices that I find tasty. I can have a healthy snack before I go out to eat to help prevent overeating at the restaurant.</i>

Black & White Thought	Alternative Thoughts

As you make changes to your way of thinking, be self-kind, not self-critical. Thinking rationally is like putting on a new, clear pair of glasses. What looked blurry or confusing before may seem more clear. New solutions to a challenge may appear once you look at it differently.

Control Catastrophic Thinking

Seeing the worst possible outcome for a situation can lead to anxiety and racing thoughts. Avoid focusing on the negative aspects of a situation or how it could be even worse. The unknown future can seem scary and full of negative potential. Dispute each irrational thought with a rational one. Challenge your “worst case scenario” with a “best case scenario” and options in between.

- What is statistically likely in this scenario?
- How might this situation turn out better than expected?
- What can I do to reduce the chances of the situation getting worse?

Think of a “mountain” that you build out of a “molehill.” Challenge your thought with rational thinking. Complete the following chart with two examples of your own.

Catastrophic Thought	Alternative Thought
Example: The more weight I lose, the more I am going to gain back later. I am better off staying overweight.	Losing weight will help my health now and in the future. I can learn tools to maintain my weight loss. Even a small weight loss will have a big impact on my health.

Catastrophic Thought	Alternative Thought

Create Self-Enhancing Feelings



Take responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, and actions. You will feel better about yourself and your life. Blaming others is a natural, child-like reaction. It is more adult-like to figure out the amount of control you have in a given situation and respond to it in a mature way. You may not have control in every situation, but you can choose how to respond to others.

One reason to become more accountable for your responses is that a “victim” response forms negative, draining feelings. Self-responsibility creates positive energy. With it you can manage every event in a more positive, self-nurturing manner. One way to do this is to look at your language and see if you use “victim” or “accountability” phrases.

Example “victim” phrase: I can’t lose weight until my family also tries to lose weight.

Example “accountability” phrase: I can talk with my family about how they can be supportive of my efforts. I can help with family meal planning so I have more control over the foods kept in the house and served during meals.

Complete the chart on the next page to practice taking responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, and actions.

The Power of a Phrase

Fill in the blank after the victim phrase with something you have caught yourself saying or feeling. In the third column, use an accountability phrase to re-write this statement.

Victim Phrase	Drained Feeling	Accountability	In Control Feeling
I can't...	Defeated	I can...	Confident
It's useless	Hopeless	There's always a chance...	Hopeful
I have to...	Obligated	I choose to...	Decisive
Why am I always the one who...	Burdened	I'll be the one who...	Secure
I should...	Guilt	I want to...	Power

Review and Prepare

This section looked at ways to create a helpful physical, social, and mental environment. Designing helpful environments can make it easier to change behaviors. Answer these questions:

What changes have you made to your physical environment (e.g., pantry, kitchen countertops, plate size)? How have these changes helped you make healthier choices?

What changes have you made to your social environment (e.g., being assertive, changing social media habits)? How have these changes helped you make healthier choices?

What changes have you made to your mental environment (e.g., banishing black and white thinking, saying nice things to yourself)? How have these changes helped you make healthier choices?

The next section focuses on physical activity and how to fit it into your daily routine. Start to think about your favorite ways to be active.