

How to Take Your Diet and Weight Loss to the Next Level

When you're working on improving your diet, it's easy to become overwhelmed by how to get started. Even if you're a seasoned dieter, you may wonder how you can get to the next step or how to make your diet a part of your lifestyle.

You need to determine where you are in order to know what you need to do next. Whether you're thinking about dieting for the first time in your life or you're trying to make your new changes something permanent, there are specific things you can do to take your diet to the next level.

I'm Not Ready for a Change

You may have some health problems or feel a like you'd like to be a smaller clothing size, but you're not really that interested in dieting yet. If that's the case, you're in the "pre-contemplation" stage of dieting. That simply means that you're not interested in making any kind of changes in your eating right now.

At this point you may be sick of having people in your life talking about dieting. You may be completely disinterested in changing anything about yourself or your routine. However, you may be having that nagging feeling that even though you're not interested in a change, it may be something good for you.

Getting to the Next Step

If you're not doing anything toward starting a new eating plan, there are some steps you can take to get you closer to that goal. Here are a few ideas:

- Make a visit to your healthcare provider and talk about your overall health, including your diet. Ask for suggestions.
- Check out a few books about nutrition from your local library. Skim through them to see if there are any tips that might work well with your lifestyle.
- Take a personal inventory. What choices are you making that seem like they might not be good for your body. What are you doing right?

At this point one of the worst things you can do is jump right in. You need to get your mind used to the idea of making a change. You also don't want to dive into something for which you aren't prepared. Instead, a few days or even weeks to educate yourself and find out what you think will work best for you.

I'm Thinking About Making a Change...Later

If you've been spending time thinking about dieting, but you haven't made any real changes yet, you're in the "contemplation" stage of dieting. That means you're seriously thinking about it, you know you need to do it, but you haven't put a plan into action. In fact, you probably don't have a plan.

When you're in this stage, you're really interested in making a change, but you may not know how to do it.

Getting to the Next Step

Here are a few tips for going from thinking about your diet to making a definitive plan.

- Gather as much information as you can about nutrition. If you're having any type of health problems related to diet, make it a special point to research what you can do.
- Make an appointment with a nutritionist or another health professional to discuss your diet.
- Talk with a friend who has a healthy diet and ask for suggestions.
- Set a goal for yourself that is measurable. For example, "For the next two weeks I will eat 4 servings of vegetables each day."
- Identify some of the barriers to starting a diet. Write them down and for each obstacle list a solution.

I'm Ready to Get Started

If you've been thinking about making a change to your diet for a long time, you may be ready to get going! This stage is known as "preparation" for your diet. You've already learned what you need to know to make changes. Now you're interested and you're ready to begin.

Getting to the Next Step

When you're preparing for dieting, these steps may help you take your plan to the next level.

- Write down a detailed plan for what you'll do to make your diet changes.
- Head to the grocery store to make sure you have all the supplies you'll need before you begin.

- Determine how you'll reward yourself for making changes.
- Double-check to make sure your goals are measurable and realistic. Don't try to overhaul everything all at once. Focus on a few small, but powerful changes.
- Enlist the help of important people in your life for support.

I'm Changing My Diet and I'm Committed

You may have spent months leading up to this moment – the beginning of a change in your diet. Now you're taking all the plans you've made and turning them into reality. This is the "action" stage of dieting.

You're working hard at your plan, but you haven't been doing it for very long. At this point you may feel really good about your changes, but you're not ready to say you've made permanent changes. Things are still a little new.

Getting to the Next Step

You may wonder, how can there be a next step when I'm already doing it? But the truth is that in the beginning of your diet there's still another level. Ultimately you want to make changes that will be lifelong to give you health that will last for years to come.

- Catalog your successes. Celebrate them!
- Seek the advice of a health professional to help you iron out any problems you may be having. Sometimes a little tweaking of your plan is necessary.
- Don't be too hard on yourself. Many people fail at making long-term changes because they give up after a bad day. Just keep going.
- Pay attention to how you're feeling. Do you have more energy? Are your clothes a little looser? Are your health problems improving? Make sure you take time to recognize the benefits of the changes you're making.
- Try new things. If you're getting bored with what you're eating, try to incorporate a new dinner meal each week.
- Use your support system. You don't have to do this alone! Sometimes friends and family can make changing easier.

I've Made Changes...And I'm Sticking To Them!

When you've changed your diet successfully for more than 6 months, you're in the "maintenance" phase of your diet. You've already educated yourself, made a plan, prepared for changes, and what's best – you've made them!

After six months of dieting, you've created habits that are likely to last a lifetime. But you need to stand guard. While you have great habits now, there are still times that you'll feel discouraged. Here are some ideas for building on your success.

- Feel free to make changes. Your plan may work for you, but it's always a good idea to take a look at your plan every few weeks and see how it's working for you. Are you still getting the benefits you desire? Are you happy with how things are going?
- Visiting with a nutritionist or healthcare provider from time to time can be a way to see how your health is benefiting from your program and how you can make small, effective improvements. There's always room to grow.
- Continue to learn more. You can always get some more information about healthful eating and even just adding some new recipes can help to keep you motivated.
- Set goals for yourself. Even if you're at the ideal weight, you can continue to set goals for your behavior that help you to track and monitor your progress.

I Was Doing So Well...What Happened?

You've been plugging along for months making sure that you give your body everything it needs. But suddenly you find that your changes are out the window and you feel like you're back where you started.

There are many things that can trigger a relapse into your unhealthy eating. For example:

- Divorce
- Holidays
- Pregnancy and a new baby
- Death of friend or family member
- Changes in job
- Stress

- Health problems

The above list is just a few of the things that may make it difficult to stay on your plan. For many people, getting off of a diet program can lead to the “what the hell” effect. In other words, “I’ve already messed up a little, so just forget the whole thing.”

But everyone is entitled to stray from time to time. The most important thing you can do is learn from what happened and get back on your program. Here are some tips for getting back on your diet:

- Identify the event or life change that began getting you off-track.
- Come up with some solutions for keeping the problem from happening again.
- Go back to your original goals and renew them.
- Talk with a nutritionist or healthcare provider about getting back on track. They can have invaluable suggestions to help you.
- Don’t dwell on your mistakes. Realize that it’s normal to make them. The only real problem occurs when you don’t recognize them and don’t work to get back to a healthy plan.
- Give yourself some credit for the changes you have made. Change is difficult! If you’ve done it once, you can do it again.

Making Changes That Last

Making changes to your diet is difficult. You should congratulate yourself for any little improvement. No matter what stage of your diet you’re in, there’s always a way to get to the next step.

Instead of trying to rush into something that will overwhelm you and set you up for failure, figure out where you are right now. Then make it a goal to get to the next phase. As you gradually make small changes in your day-to-day routine, you’ll find that your lifestyle becomes healthier.

Ultimately you want to be healthier, more fit, and happier. When you allow yourself the time and patience that major changes require, you’ll have more success. You’ll be making changes that last.