

10 simple weight loss tips

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Editor's note: People are buzzing about Jessica Simpson's amazing weight loss transformation. We're resurfacing this piece, originally published in September, so you too can reach your goal weight.

(CNN) -- Dawn Jackson Blatner, a registered dietitian and nutritionist for the Chicago Cubs, is trying to change the meaning of the phrase, "Treat yo'self."

Most people treat themselves by indulging in a gallon of ice cream or by lounging around the house, watching TV. Blatner wants "treat yourself" to mean exactly the opposite. Her definition is designed to give you more energy, help you lose weight and keep your body healthy.

"It's preplanning your grocery list. It's being in the grocery store and buying foods that nourish your body. It's eating mindfully," she told the audience at the Obesity Action Coalition's annual [Your Weight Matters](#) convention. "Those are really good things that when you do them, it's treating yourself right."

In other words, you deserve to feel good and look good, Blatner says. So putting in five or 10 minutes to plan your meals for the upcoming week or spending 30 minutes at the gym is the ultimate act of self-love.

"There's no bigger gesture in this world that says, 'You know what, Dawn? You matter.'"

Follow these 10 tips to "treat yourself" to a healthier, slimmer body:

1. Table. Plate. Chair.

Every time you put food in your mouth, you should have three things, Blatner says: a table, a plate and a chair.

These three items ensure you're not sneaking snacks from the refrigerator late at night or gulping down 1,000 calories in your car from a fast food joint. And having them probably means you're consuming more nutrients than a bag of potato chips would offer -- unless you're one of those weird people who puts potato chips on a plate.

"It's my answer to eating mindfully," Blatner says.

Eating mindfully, [research shows](#), helps people pay closer attention to the enjoyment of eating and to feelings of fullness. Studies suggest people who eat mindfully consume fewer calories at meals, no matter how much is on their plate.

2. Willpower is a mental muscle. Exercise it.

Willpower is a limited resource, psychologist Sean Connolly of San Antonio says, but we all have it. The trick is in knowing how to use it efficiently.

"People list lack of willpower as the No. 1 reason holding them back from improving their lives in some

way," says Connolly, who works regularly with bariatric patients. "Willpower is not a gene. It's a tool that we all have that we have to learn to use, develop and manage."

Like any muscle, your willpower gets tired. So you have to plan, Connolly says, and know what you will do in situations that offer a healthy choice and an unhealthy choice. You also have to be prepared for emergencies, such as at the end of a long work day, when your willpower is exhausted and the drive thru window beckons.

Willpower also needs to be replenished daily. The best way to do this? Get enough sleep.

3. Be realistic.

Let's be honest, most of us want to lose a lot of weight. And when we don't -- when we drop 5 or 10 and then hit a wall -- we get discouraged and jump back on the fried food wagon.

One of the biggest obstacles to losing weight is unrealistic expectations, says psychologist Gary Foster, director of the Center for Obesity Research and Education at Temple University.

"The less you weigh, the less you need to eat and the more you need to move (to lose weight)," Foster says. "And that's not fair."

It's nice to aim high, but successful losers drop an average of 8.4% of their body weight. If you weigh in at 200, that's about 16 pounds. And losing those 16 pounds improves your health dramatically.

In other words, hoping to weigh what you did in high school will derail your plan before it starts.

"Life changes, and that's not an apology or a cop out. It's a realistic assessment," Foster says. "What else in your life is the same at 45 as it was at 20?"

4. Find better friends.

It's known as the "socialization effect." Cigarette smokers hang out with other cigarette smokers. Drinkers hang out with other drinkers. And overweight people hang out with other overweight people, says Dr. Robert Kushner of Chicago.

"What do you do if you're hanging out with a group of people who are overweight?" he asks. You pick a restaurant. You go out for burgers and a beer. "You're probably not talking about going rollerblading."

We tend to pick up the habits of those we hang out with the most. So find some friends with healthy habits, and you'll become healthier yourself.

5. Do a cart check.

You know the [MyPlate diagram](#) -- the one that shows how your plate should be split into fruits, grains, vegetables and proteins? Your cart should look the same, Blatner says. When you think you're finished shopping, do a quick eye check to make sure it's filled with about 25% protein, 25% whole grains and 50% produce.

"Choice is the enemy of weight loss," Blatner says. She recommends planning out two healthy breakfasts, two healthy lunches, two healthy snacks and two healthy dinners for the week. Buy the ingredients you need for each and then rotate them throughout the week.

This gives you enough choice that you won't get bored but not enough choice that you're overwhelmed and end up looking for the nearest vending machine.

6. Do not eat in response to that thing.

You're at the movies. It's your cousin's bachelorette party. Your son is at the top of his graduating class. It's a ball game -- and what's a ball game without a hot dog? If you want to lose weight, avoid eating in response to "that thing," Foster says.

Plan what you're going to eat at these special -- or not so special -- occasions so you don't have to rely on your willpower. And only eat when you're hungry. There will be more food at the next thing.

7. Tell yourself: "I have the right to be thin."

Self-sabotage is a real problem in weight loss, Connolly says. A lot of times his clients say they want something and then go out of their way to make sure it doesn't happen.

It's not a lack of desire or motivation. "Something holds us back," he says.

We have to learn to validate ourselves, Connolly says, because we'll never get everything we need from other people. Tell yourself daily that you deserve to be healthy. You deserve to look and feel good. Then believe it.

8. Set S.M.A.R.T. goals.

If you haven't heard this acronym before, memorize it now. Any goal you set should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely, says Eliza Kingsford, psychotherapist and director of clinical services for Wellspring. If it meets these qualities, you'll be much more likely to achieve it.

For instance, "I'm going to be more active" is a goal. "I will walk for 30 minutes every day for the next month" is a S.M.A.R.T. goal.

It's specific in that you know how much activity you're going to do. It's measurable -- did you walk today or not?

It's attainable and realistic; everyone can find 30 minutes in their day, and walking doesn't require a lot of equipment or special training. And it's timely because you'll be able to see at the end of the month if you hit your goal.

9. Stand up.

Most of us now spend eight hours a day sitting at our desks at work, and two to three hours sitting at home. That kind of sedentary lifestyle is nearly impossible to counteract, Dr. Holly Lofton of New York says, even if you hit the gym for two hours a day (and who does that?).

She suggests wearing a step counter that will keep you aware of the movement -- or lack of movement -- you're making throughout the day. Try standing up at your desk while on a conference call, or walking to a colleague's desk instead of e-mailing him. Take the stairs. Park farther away. Everything counts!

10. Life will never be stress-free. Learn to cope.

Scientists disagree about whether stress itself produces a physical change in your body that can lead to significant weight gain. But we all know the effect a stressful day can have on our willpower.

The problem, Kushner says, is that there never will be a long period in your life without stress. And if we cope with everyday stress by indulging in brownies and vodka, the weight will continue to pile on.

"Life happens. It's not so much stress that causes weight gain, it's the coping, the push back," he says.

The key is to learn positive coping skills. If work is stressing you out, take a 10-minute walk instead of hitting up the cookie tray in the breakroom. Take a yoga class at the end of a long week. Use deep breaths to get through a phone call with your mother.

And treat yourself to a stress-less day.

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