



Reaching Your Goals

by Alexis Williams, RD



Healthy Choices

Many people start the journey down the path to better health by taking up a new activity or trying to change their diet. While good intentions are abundant, many times the goal isn't achieved for various reasons. As creatures of habit, changing our eating habits can be one of the hardest things to do.

Making changes takes courage, but where the real motivation comes in is maintaining changes over the long-term. Whether the goal is to lose (and keep off) that nagging 10 lb before a spring race, to achieve optimal health, or to gain muscle and improve your lean body mass, these eight tips will help you reach your goals.

1. Write a list of the reasons why you want to change or achieve this goal. The desire to achieve these goals must be greater than the benefit of remaining in your current state. Review this list daily or more often to keep your mind focused on the goal.
2. Survive suppers by planning in advance. If you and your family are out most evenings for activities, make sure you have a plan to avoid eating fast foods more than once every few weeks. Set aside time each weekend to make up freezer casseroles, frozen dinners and soups, chili and sauces loaded with vegetables, beans and legumes for quick and easy warm winter meals. Prep snacks and produce in ready-to-go containers.
3. Keep the food you want to eat readily available and front and centre in your fridge and cupboards. For example, if you're trying to eat more lean protein to gain muscle, you'll need to keep protein sources like chicken, fish and cottage cheese in portable containers for when you get busy. What you see is likely what you'll eat.
4. Find a friend who has a similar goal to talk with about struggles and challenges you may face. Together you can discuss progress and troubleshoot obstacles and exchange ideas. Two heads are more often better than one. If this isn't an option for you, seek the help of a registered dietitian or a support group program.

About Alexis

Alexis Williams is a registered dietitian and personal trainer in Burlington, Ontario. She is an avid runner and triathlete. Visit her website www.transitionhealth.ca for more articles and ideas or to contact Alexis for online or in-person nutrition coaching services.



Temptation

5. Include occasional indulgences or smaller treats more often. Allowing a few 100 calories per day of flexibility for having a small portion of beer or wine or maybe some chocolate can help you stay on track and not feel deprived. Deprivation from overly strict diets usually leads to binges and failures. Learning to manage food cravings and indulgences that don't align with your goals is essential for long-term success.
6. Be firm with people who may try to derail you from your goals. Simply saying "I'm trying to eat better" can let them know you're focused. For you to reach your goal, you need to stick to your plan about 80% to 90% of the time and the more often you stray, the longer it takes to reach the goal.
7. Address physiological and psychological barriers. The physiological is usually the easier one to address. Many of our cravings can be explained by blood sugar fluctuations. For example, if you frequently eat fast food because you're starving after a long day at work, you need to plan a snack with protein and fruit or veggies for the afternoon or on the way home. Psychological barriers can be more difficult but are important to address for long-term success. For example, if you eat junk food at night because you're stressed or bored, you need to find a distraction. Making a list of healthy distractions can be helpful. Examples include going for a walk, calling a friend or heading to the bookstore or library.
8. Get your family involved in helping you reach your goal. In most cases, your family should be supportive of you reaching a goal. If they are not, then you need to address this, possibly with the help of a family therapist. For example, if you struggle with dinners, get an older child to help in the kitchen. It may be a little more work initially to get them into a routine, but the benefits will pay off. If you struggle to fit in training or feel guilty about leaving your family, ask your kids or spouse to be your coach for a workout and ride their bike or hang out while you're on the treadmill.

As you embark on a new goal, remember to celebrate success along the way. This will motivate you to keep going and create positive feelings that will empower you to continue. ❖

