



Recipe for Better Health

Food, Water and Weight Change

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There are not enough letters in the alphabet to list all the helpful tips that assist in developing a healthy eating regime! That's right: regime, not a "diet".

While the word diet can simply describe the foods a person habitually eats, it has also come to mean something quite different: a short-term, restrictive eating pattern to lose weight or manage a medical condition. There are countless gurus promoting fad diets which at best give false hope and at worst can create further health issues.

Rapid, radical changes are rarely the answer. Your goal should be to commit to a plan, be consistent, and make small, sustainable changes over time.

Below is an A–Z list of ideas you can implement gradually to support healthier eating and sustainable weight management.

A – Act

The biggest barrier I see is not a lack of information; it's a lack of action. Nothing changes unless you do.

Complaining about your health without taking steps to change is a form of surrender: "I am unhappy with my health, but I am a victim of my circumstances." If you believe you can change, you are already pointing yourself in the right direction.

Don't set huge goals at the start. Take small, achievable steps toward healthier eating and build momentum.

B – Behaviour

Behaviour is the engine of change. Once you know what to do, the work is in actually doing it.

Reflect on your habits:

- Where do you shop?
- What do you buy by default?
- Do you plan your weekly meals or wing it?
- How often do you buy takeaway or highly processed foods?
- Do you keep healthy options visible and accessible at home?

Planning and preparation matter. Set your environment up to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

C – Commit, Change (Incremental), Consistency and Counselling Psychologist

If you genuinely want weight change, you need commitment, incremental change, and consistency. Change takes time.

A Counselling Psychologist can support you with:

- Motivation and behaviour change strategies
- Addressing emotional eating, trauma, anxiety or depression that may undermine efforts
- Problem-solving when you plateau or feel like giving up

- Using evidence-based approaches (e.g., CBT, ACT, behavioural activation) to support sustainable habits

Psychologists specialise in behaviour change. Having a skilled, empathic professional in your corner dramatically increases the chances of long-term success.

C – Colour

Healthy food is usually colourful. No, not lollies – real food.

A mostly beige/brown diet (white bread, pastries, pizza dough, chips, deep-fried foods) usually means high refined carbohydrates and ultra-processed products.

Aim for natural colours: greens, reds, oranges, purples. These often signal fibre, vitamins, minerals and beneficial plant compounds.

D – Doctor

Talk to your GP about your health and weight concerns. They can:

- Screen for underlying contributors like diabetes, hypothyroidism, sleep apnoea, or hormonal issues
- Check blood pressure, cholesterol, and other cardiovascular risk factors
- Refer you to an accredited dietitian or specialist, if appropriate

Always involve your GP if you have existing conditions, take medications, or are contemplating significant dietary changes.

E – Exercise

Don't rely on exercise alone to lose weight, but don't underestimate its importance either.

It is very easy to “eat back” the energy burned in a single exercise session (e.g., a muffin can rival the kilojoules burned in an hour of moderate walking), which is why diet change is usually more powerful for

weight loss. At the same time, evidence shows that exercise plus diet leads to better long-term weight maintenance, improved body composition, and better metabolic and mental health than diet alone.

Use exercise to:

- Maintain muscle mass and metabolic rate
- Improve cardiovascular health
- Support mood, stress management, and sleep

Choose activities you enjoy. Build movement into your daily life: take the stairs, walk up the escalator, park further away, and carry your groceries. Small changes add up.

F – Flow

Engaging in flow activities – tasks you find deeply absorbing – can prevent boredom eating and stress eating. When you are immersed, you're less likely to loiter near the pantry or fridge.

Flow activities also improve mood and reduce stress, both of which help reduce emotional or comfort eating.

G – Grocery Shopping

This is one of the most strategic leverage points.

- Don't shop when hungry.
- Make a list and stick to it.
- Avoid aisles that are basically traps (soft drinks, confectionery, many snack aisles).
- Prioritise fresh, minimally processed ingredients, especially vegetables and wholegrains.
- Limit fruit to around two serves per day, which aligns with Australian dietary guidelines.

If fresh fruit regularly goes off at home, frozen fruit (without added sugar) can be an excellent alternative.

H – Homeostasis

Your body constantly works to maintain physiological balance (homeostasis). When your intake is highly skewed (e.g., very salty foods), your body will push you towards compensatory behaviours (e.g., craving fluids).

Cravings can sometimes be related to genuine physiological needs, but they're also influenced by habit, emotional cues, and environment. A balanced, nutrient-dense diet and regular meals help stabilise blood sugar and reduce extremes in hunger and cravings.

H – Hydration

Stay well hydrated. Thirst is often mistaken for hunger.

Water assists:

- Metabolism
- Digestion
- Kidney function and waste removal

Choosing water (or unsweetened tea) instead of sugary drinks is one of the simplest, highest-yield changes you can make.

I – Information Technology

Use your smartphone in your favour.

Apps like MyNetDiary, MyFitnessPal, or similar can help you:

- Track food intake and kilojoules/calories
- Monitor protein, carbs and fat
- Log water intake
- Pair with wearables to see steps and energy expenditure

Calorie/kilojoule tracking isn't mandatory forever, but it can be extremely eye-opening and help you understand your true intake and how to create an appropriate energy deficit.

J – Judge (Food Labels & Star Ratings)

Become a critical reader of food labels.

- Limit foods high in added sugar, saturated fat and sodium.
- Use the Health Star Rating as a quick comparative tool, aiming for higher-rated options where possible.
- Still read the ingredient list – a 4–5 star rating doesn't automatically mean the food fits your goals, but it's a useful guide.

Choosing healthier packaged options also sends a market signal encouraging manufacturers to improve product formulations.

K – Kilojoules

To lose weight, you must, over time, consume less energy than you expend.

For example, if an individual needs ~8,700 kJ per day to maintain weight, reducing intake to ~6,600 kJ (with similar activity) would typically yield gradual weight loss of about 0.5 kg/week, though individual results vary.

Using an app is the most accurate way to keep an eye on kilojoule or calorie intake and adjust as needed.

L – Liquify (Chew Your Food)

Food should be mechanically broken down by chewing before you swallow. Proper chewing:

- Increases surface area for digestive enzymes
- Slows eating, improving satiety
- May reduce energy intake at meals

Experimental studies show that chewing more thoroughly (e.g., 30–40 chews per bite) can reduce immediate energy intake and lower self-reported hunger. Over time, wolfing food down may contribute to overeating and weight gain. So: masticate!

M – Microbes

Your lower bowel hosts an enormous community of bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms (the gut microbiome).

Research links gut microbiome composition with:

- Metabolism and energy balance
- Blood glucose regulation
- Appetite and fat storage
- Immune and inflammatory responses
- Mood and mental health

Dysbiosis (an unhealthy balance of gut microbes) is associated with obesity, type 2 diabetes, and inflammatory bowel disease, among other conditions – though these relationships are complex and not purely cause–effect.

Feed your gut microbes with:

- High-fibre foods
- Resistant starch (e.g., legumes, wholegrains, cooled potatoes/rice)
- A diverse range of plant foods

In short: stop eating only for your taste buds – start eating for your gut bacteria.

M – Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a powerful tool for weight management. It helps you:

- Reduce stress, which in turn can ease stress-eating
- Notice thoughts, feelings, cravings and triggers without automatically acting on them
- Slow down and actually taste your food
- Give your body time to register fullness signals

Mindful eating – paying attention to the experience of eating, hunger, fullness and satisfaction – is associated with better dietary choices and lower risk of overeating.

N – Nutrition

Aim for a balanced, evidence-based eating pattern rather than a rigid “diet”.

If you have specific medical or dietary needs (e.g., coeliac disease, kidney disease, diabetes, eating disorders), consult:

- Your GP
- An accredited practising dietitian

If you reduce animal products, plan carefully to ensure adequate protein, iron, vitamin B12, calcium, iodine and omega-3s.

Supplements can be useful in some cases, but they’re not a substitute for a balanced diet and should be discussed with your doctor.

O – Obsess? No.

Becoming overly rigid or anxious about food is unhelpful and can slide toward disordered eating.

Food should be:

- Enjoyable
- Nutritious
- Satisfying

If you consistently choose mostly whole, minimally processed foods in appropriate portions, you can enjoy what you eat without turning every meal into a moral exam.

P – Plant-Based

There are many “named” diets. Before adopting any approach, research the pros and cons, and speak to your GP if you have health conditions.

A plant-forward pattern, rich in minimally processed plant foods, is strongly associated with better health outcomes:

- Lower body weight and waist circumference
- Improved insulin sensitivity and blood sugar control
- Lower risk of cardiovascular disease and some cancers

Focus on: vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, legumes, nuts, seeds, and healthy fats – whether or not you include modest amounts of animal products.

P – Poo (Yes, Really)

The Bristol Stool Chart classifies stool into 7 types, ranging from hard lumps (constipation) to liquid (diarrhoea).

A healthy bowel habit typically involves:

- Being able to hold on when needed
- Passing a bowel motion within about a minute of sitting down
- No significant pain or straining
- A feeling of complete emptying

Ideal stool is soft, sausage-like and easy to pass. Persistent changes in bowel habits, blood in the stool, or pain should be discussed with your GP.

P – Protein

Protein is one of the most important nutrients for weight management. Higher protein intake (within safe limits and tailored to medical needs):

- Increases satiety compared with equal-energy carbohydrate or fat
- Helps preserve muscle mass during weight loss
- Slightly increases energy expenditure via diet-induced thermogenesis

Ensuring each meal contains a good protein source (e.g., legumes, eggs, yoghurt, fish, poultry, tofu) can help control hunger and reduce overeating.

Q – Quantity

“Healthy” does not mean “unlimited”. Even nutritious foods contain energy. Portion size still matters.

- Use smaller plates and bowls
- Serve food onto a plate rather than eating from the packet
- Check serving sizes in apps or guides such as CSIRO materials
- Eat slowly enough to notice fullness

You absolutely know the “just one more” trap. Don’t pretend you don’t now.

R – Realistic

Set realistic, compassionate goals.

Your first step is not “lose 20 kilos”; it’s:

- Improve my breakfast
- Cut soft drinks
- Walk three times a week

Initially, aim to halt further weight gain and build habits. Fat loss often follows after a lag period, especially as your body adjusts. Different people lose weight at different rates, even when eating similarly.

Be persistent and patient. Long-term change matters more than rapid early drops.

R – Routine

The body responds well to routine.

- Regular meal patterns can reduce overeating and wild swings in hunger.
- Consistency in sleep and activity helps hormones and energy.

But don't become so rigid that you can never enjoy a meal out or variation. A flexible, steady routine beats perfection every time.

R – Reward

Acknowledge and celebrate progress – but not with junk food.

Non-food rewards might include:

- New clothes that fit well (and don't fall down in public)
- A massage
- A new book or experience
- Sharing your achievement with supportive people

Reinforce the identity shift: "I am someone who looks after their health."

S – Sugars and Carbohydrates

Liquid sugar is a major problem in modern diets.

- Replace sugary drinks and most fruit juices with water, soda water, or kombucha with low/no added sugar.
- Add lemon, lime or mint for flavour.
- Limit fruit to about two serves per day. Whole fruit is better than juice.
- Be wary of smoothies: they can pack a large sugar and energy load, especially if made with fruit juice, honey, ice cream or sorbet.

Carbohydrates are not the enemy, but source and amount matter. Prefer high-fibre, low-GI carbs (wholegrains, legumes, vegetables) over refined, ultra-processed carbs.

S – Snake Oil

Be sceptical of:

- "Miracle" fat-burning pills
- Extreme detoxes
- Quick-fix online programs promising massive loss in weeks

Most are unproven, often expensive, and sometimes unsafe. Evidence consistently shows that sustainable weight loss and health gains come from long-term changes in diet and lifestyle, not magic cures.

Always speak to your doctor before starting any pills, powders or extreme programs.

S – Sustainable

Short-term, extreme strategies almost always fail once you return to old habits.

Ask: "Could I safely do this for 12 months? 3 years?"

If the answer is "no", it probably isn't sustainable. Build a regime you can live with.

T – Timely

Change takes time.

Highly restrictive deadlines ("I must lose X kg in 4 weeks") frequently create:

- Crash dieting
- Rebound weight gain
- Frustration and shame

Instead, accept that every small, consistent change is a brick in the wall. Focus on the process and let the scale follow.

U – Unlearn

You may need to unlearn unhelpful associations with food.

- Only eat in designated eating spaces (e.g., dining table, staff room) – not at your desk, in bed, or in front of the TV.
- Identify patterns like “boredom = snack” or “stress = sugar” and replace them with alternative coping strategies (walk, breathing exercise, journaling, quick call to a friend).

Breaking context-based habits is a big part of behaviour change.

V – Variety

Variety increases nutrient coverage and reduces boredom.

- Rotate vegetables, fruits, wholegrains and proteins
- Experiment with herbs and spices instead of relying on salt and sugar
- Try new recipes, cuisines, and cooking methods

If you become bored, you’re more likely to slide back to “high-incentive” processed foods.

W – Waist Size

Clothing fit and waist circumference are often more meaningful than the number on the scale.

Central fat (around the abdomen) is strongly associated with higher cardiometabolic risk.

If your belt notch changes, or your pants become loose enough to threaten a wardrobe malfunction in the supermarket, you’re probably moving in the right direction.

W – Wholemeal and Wholegrains

Wholegrains and wholemeal products:

- Are higher in fibre
- Improve satiety
- Support gut health
- Are associated with lower risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers

Whenever you can, swap white bread, white rice and refined cereals for wholegrain or lower-GI options.

X – Xperiment

Yes, we’re bending spelling for the sake of the alphabet.

Be willing to experiment:

- Try new vegetables and plant-based dishes Explore vegan or vegetarian options on menus
- Play with different cooking techniques (roasting, grilling, stir-frying, slow-cooking)

You may discover foods and flavours you’ve been missing out on for years.

Y – You

This is about your health and your wellbeing – not chasing someone else’s body shape or an airbrushed ideal.

We all have different genetics, histories, and bodies. Focus on:

- Feeling stronger, clearer, and more energetic
- Improving health markers (sleep, mood, blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol)
- Becoming a kinder, more respectful custodian of the body you have

Treat your body the way you’d treat a close friend: with care, respect and patience.

Z – Zzzzz – Sleep

Sleep is one of the most underrated tools in weight and health management.

Poor or short sleep disrupts hunger and satiety hormones (ghrelin and leptin), increases cravings, and is associated with a higher risk of obesity and metabolic problems.

You also expend energy while asleep, and adequate sleep supports:

- Mood and self-control
- Recovery and repair
- Hormonal balance

Intermittent fasting / time-restricted eating can be layered around sleep (e.g., eating within a 10-hour window such as 8am–6pm). Current evidence suggests intermittent fasting is roughly comparable to other calorie-reduction approaches in terms of weight loss – helpful for some, not special or superior for everyone.

If you experiment with fasting, do it safely, avoid very restrictive windows without medical advice, and discuss it with your GP if you have diabetes, are pregnant, on medications, or have a history of disordered eating.

If you would like support making these changes, you can book an appointment with iflow Psychology on (02) 6061 1144 or visit www.iflowpsychology.com.au. We offer telephone, telehealth, and face-to-face consultations and would be pleased to assist you on your journey to better health.

Disclaimer: *The information provided in this article is general in nature and for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek advice from your doctor and relevant health professionals before making significant changes to your diet, activity, or health regimen, especially if you have existing health concerns or medical conditions.*
