WORKBOOK

POSITIVE CHOICE
INTEGRATIVE
WELLNESS CENTER

POWER OF LIFESTYLE

Positive Choice
Integrative Wellness Center

www.positivechoice.org

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WELCOME

Over the next 8 weeks we will discuss topics related to the power of developing a practical, sustainable lifestyle that supports your goals. We will focus on eating healthfully, discovering joyful movement, and building sustainable habits. As part of this program, you are provided with a structured meal and fitness plan to guide your daily choices. Each class session will cover different elements of your meal plan and fitness plan and discuss how you can make lasting changes. You'll also be provided with time to ask questions, meal plan for the week, and write your own fitness goals based on where you are at today.

This workbook will supplement your weekly discussions. While you are free to read this book at your own pace, we will refer you to specific pages in class too. Additionally, each section includes journal prompts and often QR codes are provided for further education. Consider making time to enjoy your supplemental materials. All of these tools are intentionally provided to support you in your journey.

– The Positive Choice Integrative Wellness Center

Meal & Fitness Plans

Scan QR Code for printable meal plan and fitness plan worksheets

positivechoice.org/8weekplans

MEAL PLANS AND FITNESS GOALS
Meal & Fitness Plans
Scan QR Code for printable meal plan and fitness plan worksheets
positivechoice.org/8weekplans

CHOOSING YOUR MEAL PLAN

These meal plans are a starting point for your weight loss journey. Each plan gives you a daily structure based on your height and activity level.

Choose the plan that best matches your body size and typical day. If you are between plans, start with the one that feels most realistic and sustainable.

These are general guidelines. Your plan may change over time based on your hunger, energy, activity level, progress, and goals. The goal is to find a plan that supports weight loss while still helping you feel steady, satisfied, and able to keep going.

LOWER NEEDS PLAN

The Lower Needs Plan may be a good starting point if you:

- Are under 5'2"
- Have a lower activity level most days
- Sit for much of the day
- Get fewer than 5,000 steps per day
- Do light activity less than 3 days per week

Examples of activity may include:

- Easy walking
- Chair yoga
- Gentle stretching
- Short, low-effort movement breaks

MODERATE NEEDS PLAN

The Moderate Needs Plan may be a good starting point if you:

- Are between 5'3" and 5'7"
- Have a moderate activity level most days
- Get about 5,500–7,000 steps per day
- Exercise 2–4 days per week for 30 minutes or more

Examples of activity may include:

- Weight lifting
- Hiking
- Fast walking
- Swimming
- Group fitness classes
- Longer walks

HIGHER NEEDS PLAN

The Higher Needs Plan may be a good starting point if you:

- Are 5'8" or taller
- Have a moderate to high activity level most days
- Have a job that keeps you on your feet
- Do manual labor
- Get more than 7,500 steps per day
- Exercise 4–6 days per week for 30 minutes or more

Examples of activity may include:

- Weight lifting
- Hiking
- Running
- Aerobics
- Power walking
- High intensity interval training (HIIT)
- Swimming
- Physical work or active jobs

Disclaimer: *These are general guidelines to get you started. We'll work together to adjust as needed. You will determine which plan works best for you.*

FOOD GROUPS

Healthy Protein

» **1 oz (about 7 g protein) is 1 serving** of healthy proteins like tofu/soy, fish, chicken/turkey, low-fat dairy, beans, lentils, eggs, and seitan.

Healthy Fats

» Aim for small amounts of healthy fats like avocado, olive oil, nuts, and seeds.

- **Avocado, ¼ whole**
- **Hemp milk, 1 cup**
- **Nut butter, 1½ tsp**
- **Nuts, 2 tbsp**
- **Nut milk, 1 cup**
- **Oil, 1 tsp**
- **Olives, 8-10 small**
- **Seeds, 1 tbsp**

Nonstarchy Vegetables

» **½ cup cooked or 1 cup raw is one serving** of fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables. These are high-fiber, lower-carbohydrate vegetables like greens, peppers, eggplant, carrots, etc.

Fruits

» **1 cup is one serving** of fresh, frozen, or canned (not in syrup) fruits of all colors.

Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables

» **½ cup (or 1 slice) is 1 serving** of high fiber carbohydrates like sweet potatoes, peas, corn, whole-wheat bread, oatmeal, brown rice, beans, lentils, corn tortillas.

Meal Replacements

» Meal replacement shakes, soups, or bars.

Meal replacements may be replaced with:

- 1 protein or healthy fat

  AND

- 1 nonstarchy vegetable or fruit

DAILY LOG: 3 MEAL REPLACEMENTS
Lower Calorie Needs

LOWER NEEDS

- Meal Replacements ☐ ☐ ☐
- Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables ☐
- Nonstarchy Vegetables ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Fruits ☐ ☐
- Healthy Protein ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Healthy Fats ☐ ☐

DAILY PLAN EXAMPLE

Meal 1	Meal 2	Meal 3	Meal 4	Meal 5
☐ Meal replacement ☐ 1 grain/bean/ starchy veggie ☐ 1 fruit ☐ 1 healthy fat	☐ Meal replacement	☐ 2 proteins ☐ 2 vegetables ☐ 1 fruit ☐ 1 healthy fat	☐ 2 proteins ☐ 3 vegetables	☐ Meal replacement
1 meal replacement ½ cup oatmeal 1 apple 1 cup almond milk	1 meal replacement	2 oz salmon 2 cups mixed greens 1 serving oranges 1 tbsp oil-based dressing	2 oz chicken breast 3 cups green beans	1 meal replacement

DAILY LOG: 3 MEAL REPLACEMENTS
Moderate Calorie Needs

MODERATE NEEDS

Meal Replacements ☐ ☐ ☐

Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables ☐ ☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Fruits ☐ ☐

Healthy Protein ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Healthy Fats ☐ ☐ ☐

DAILY PLAN EXAMPLE

Meal 1	Meal 2	Meal 3	Meal 4	Meal 5
☐ Meal replacement ☐ 1 grain/bean/ starchy veggie ☐ 1 fruit ☐ 1 healthy fat	☐ Meal replacement	☐ 3 proteins ☐ 1 grain/bean/ starchy veggie ☐ 2 vegetables ☐ 1 healthy fat	☐ 4 proteins ☐ 3 vegetables ☐ 1 fruit ☐ 1 healthy fat	☐ Meal replacement
 1 meal replacement 1 slice whole wheat toast 1 cup grapes ¼ avocado	 1 meal replacement	 3 oz chicken breast 2 cups green beans and arugula ½ cup sweet potatoes 1 tsp olive oil	 4 oz salmon 3 cups mixed greens 1 serving oranges 1 tbsp oil-based dressing	 1 meal replacement

DAILY LOG: 3 MEAL REPLACEMENTS
Higher Calorie Needs

HIGHER NEEDS

Meal Replacements ☐ ☐ ☐

Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables ☐ ☐ ☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables/Fruits ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Fruits ☐ ☐

Healthy Protein ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Healthy Fats ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

DAILY PLAN EXAMPLE

Meal 1	Meal 2	Meal 3	Meal 4	Meal 5
☐ Meal replacement	☐ Meal replacement	☐ 4 proteins	☐ 4 proteins	☐ Meal replacement
☐ 1 grain/bean/ starchy veggie		☐ 1 grain/bean/ starchy veggie	☐ 3 vegetables	
☐ 1 fruit		☐ 2 vegetables	☐ 1 fruit	
☐ 1 healthy fat		☐ 1 healthy fat	☐ 2 healthy fats	
1 meal replacement ½ cup mashed pinto beans 1 cup mango slices 1 tsp olive oil (in beans)	1 meal replacement	4 oz chicken breast 2 cups green beans and arugula ½ cup sweet potatoes 1 tsp olive oil	4 oz shrimp 3 cups zucchini noodles 1 serving figs 2 tsp olive oil	1 meal replacement

UNDERSTANDING CHANGES IN HUNGER

As you work on your eating and fitness patterns, you may notice changes in your hunger, cravings, or fullness. This is a normal part of the process. When you eat fewer calories or change your usual eating patterns, your body may respond by making hunger feel stronger or more noticeable.

Hunger is a signal from your body. The goal is to learn how to respond to hunger in a way that supports your health and weight-loss goals.

Why Does Hunger Feel Different?

- **Your Stomach & Digestion Are Adjusting –** When you change your portions, meal timing, or food choices, your body may need time to adjust. Hunger may feel different than it did before.
- **Hunger Signals May Feel Stronger –** During weight loss, your body may try to protect its current weight by increasing hunger signals. This can make cravings or urges to eat feel more intense.
- **Emotional & Habitual Eating –** It is common to eat out of habit, stress, boredom, or routine. Sometimes the urge to eat is not physical hunger.
- **Food Variety & Satisfaction –** Meals with different amounts of protein, fiber, and fat can affect how full you feel. If meals are not balanced, you may feel hungry more often.

How to Manage Hunger in a Healthy Way

Instead of feeling frustrated by hunger, think of it as a signal guiding you toward what your body needs. Here are some strategies to help you stay satisfied and in control.

- **Recognize True Hunger –** Try using the "3 D's" coping tool to delay and distract yourself before making the decision on whether or what to eat.
- **Eat Balanced Meals –** Include protein and fiber in each meal to increase satisfaction and stay full longer.
- **Stick to a Consistent Eating Schedule –** Regular meals and snacks can help regulate your hunger and minimize overeating.
- **Stay Hydrated –** Thirst is often mistaken for hunger. Drinking enough water can help control cravings.
- **Eat Mindfully –** Slow down, chew thoroughly, and enjoy your food so your brain has time to recognize and satisfaction.
- **Be Patient With Yourself –** Your body and brain are adjusting to new habits. This takes time and practice.

REMINDER: If you notice that you're experiencing persistent hunger, that may be a sign that you need a higher calorie meal plan to start.

MEAL PLANNING

Setting Yourself Up for Success

Planning your meals doesn't have to be hard. In fact, it can help you feel less stressed, save money, and support your goals with food.

Why Plan Meals?

- Helps you stay on track with your eating goals
- Saves time and money
- Makes healthy choices easier
- Reduces last-minute decisions (and takeout!)

Tips to Get Started

1. Start Small

Begin by planning just a few meals or snacks ahead of time, maybe breakfast for the week or dinners for 3 nights.

2. Create a Healthy Plate

For your meal, aim to fill your plate with:

- Healthy vegetables and fruits
- Lean protein

And depending on your eating plan

- Whole grains or starchy vegetables
- A healthy fat

3. Repeat What Works

It's okay to eat the same meals a few times a week. This makes shopping and cooking easier.

4. Prep What You Can

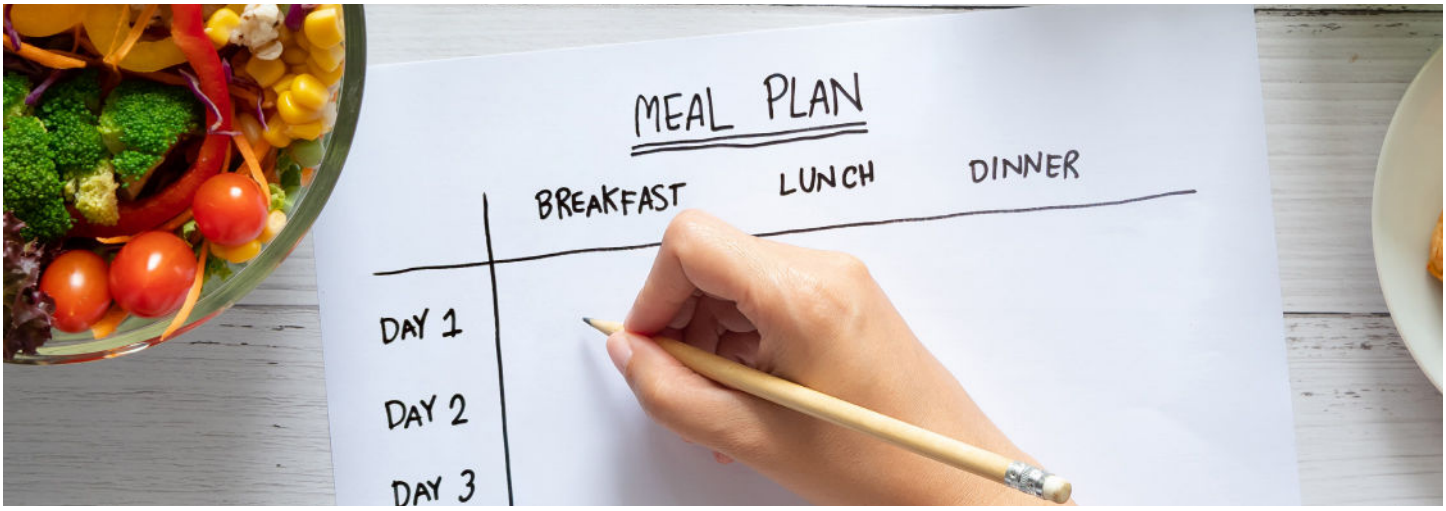
Cut vegetables, cook a batch of grains or protein, or portion out snacks when you have time.

5. Make a Shopping List

Planning meals first helps you write a grocery list that's faster and less expensive.

Remember:

Meal planning isn't about being perfect. It's about having a plan so that your week feels a little easier. Give yourself grace as you learn what works for you and your lifestyle.



EXAMPLE SHOPPING LISTS

Choose a shopping list based on how many meal replacements you consume per day.

3 MEAL REPLACEMENTS

SHOPPING LIST

- [ ] 5 servings nonstarchy vegetables
- [ ] 2 servings fruits
- [ ] 4-8 servings healthy proteins
- [ ] 1-3 servings whole grains/beans/starches
- [ ] 2-4 servings healthy fats

2 MEAL REPLACEMENTS

SHOPPING LIST

- [ ] 5 servings nonstarchy vegetables
- [ ] 2 servings fruits
- [ ] 7-12 servings healthy proteins
- [ ] 2-3 servings whole grains/beans/starches
- [ ] 2-4 servings healthy fats

1 MEAL REPLACEMENT

SHOPPING LIST

- [ ] 5 servings nonstarchy vegetables
- [ ] 2 servings fruits
- [ ] 8-12 servings healthy proteins
- [ ] 2-3 servings whole grains/beans/starches
- [ ] 2-4 servings healthy fats

NO MEAL REPLACEMENTS

SHOPPING LIST

- [ ] 5 servings nonstarchy vegetables
- [ ] 3 servings fruits
- [ ] 10-14 servings healthy proteins
- [ ] 2-3 servings whole grains/beans/starches
- [ ] 2-4 servings healthy fats

MAKE YOUR OWN SHOPPING LISTS

GROCERY LIST

Nonstarchy Vegetables	Proteins
Fruits	Whole Grains/Beans/ Starchy Vegetables
Healthy Fats	Other

GROCERY LIST

Nonstarchy Vegetables	Proteins
Fruits	Whole Grains/Beans/ Starchy Vegetables
Healthy Fats	Other

GROCERY LIST

Nonstarchy Vegetables	Proteins
Fruits	Whole Grains/Beans/ Starchy Vegetables
Healthy Fats	Other

GROCERY LIST

Nonstarchy Vegetables	Proteins
Fruits	Whole Grains/Beans/ Starchy Vegetables
Healthy Fats	Other

WEEKLY FITNESS GOALS

Use this 8-week plan as a guide to build a routine that fits your current fitness level. Each week adds one small focus area to help you improve strength, cardio, balance, flexibility, and daily movement over time.

WEEK 1: STRENGTH FREQUENCY

Focus on getting strength training consistently:

- *New to strength?* Start with 1–2 days
- *Already doing 1–2 days?* Add 1 more day
- *Doing 3+ days?* Keep it consistent this week

WEEK 2: BALANCE

Improve stability and injury prevention:

- Balance on one foot (use support as needed)
- Stand up from a chair without using your hands
- Include yoga or tai chi

WEEK 3: CARDIO ENDURANCE

Build endurance by adding time each week:

- *New to cardio?* Start with 5 minutes
- *Walking 30 minutes?* Add 5 more minutes
- *At 120 minutes/week?* Add 15–20 minute

WEEK 4: STRETCHING FOR MOBILITY

Add stretching after workouts or on rest days:

- *New to stretching?* Start with 1 day (5 minutes)
- *Stretching sometimes?* Add 1 more day or a few minutes
- *Stretching regularly?* Aim for 2–3 days per week

WEEK 5: CARDIO INTENSITY

Increase stamina and cardiovascular capacity:

- Add short bursts of faster pace
- Choose routes with hills or increase resistance
- Include intervals 1–2 days per week

WEEK 6: CARDIO FREQUENCY

Find ways to increase current cardio frequency:

- Add 1 more day of cardio
- Try a different type of cardio
- Combine different activities in the same week

WEEK 7: DAILY ACTIVITY

Find ways to increase daily movement:

- Park farther away or take the stairs
- Get up and move every hour
- Add short walks during the day

WEEK 8: STRENGTH INTENSITY

Build strength by increasing intensity:

- Increase weight or resistance
- Increase repetitions
- Progress to more challenging exercises

FITNESS GOAL LOGS

WEEK #	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
What you did this week?							
What will you add next week?							

WEEK #	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
What you did this week?							
What will you add next week?							

WEEK #	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
What you did this week?							
What will you add next week?							

01
EATING HEALTHFULLY

FOOD GROUPS

Some foods do not fit neatly into one group. Where a food "counts" may depend on your eating pattern, cultural food traditions, or how the food is used in the meal. For example, beans can count as a protein food or a starchy food.

Healthy Protein

- Aim for healthy proteins like beans, lentils, tofu/soy, fish, chicken/turkey, and low-fat dairy.

Nonstarchy Vegetables

- Eat a variety of fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables. These are lower-carbohydrate vegetables like greens, peppers, carrots, etc.

Whole Grains and Starchy Vegetables

- Aim to eat more whole grains (whole-wheat bread, oatmeal, brown rice, peas, corn tortillas). These foods are high- fiber carbohydrates.

Healthy Fats

- Aim for small amounts of healthy fats like avocado, olive oil, nuts, and seeds.

Fruits

- Eat plenty of fruits of all colors.

Flavorings

- Season foods with herbs, spices, and citrus.

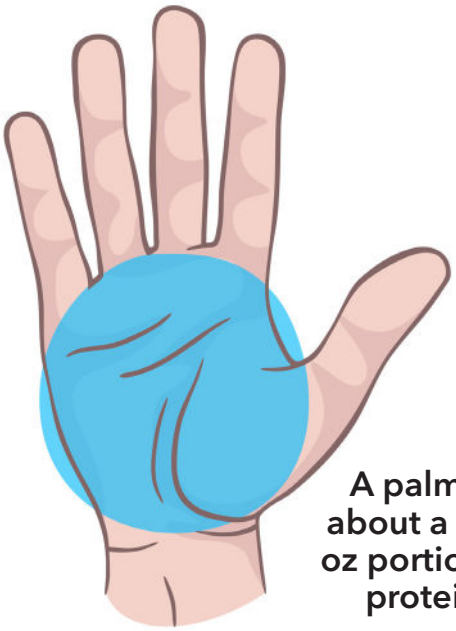
Alcohol: If you drink alcohol, keep your intake low (no more than 1 or 2 drinks a day for most people). Remember: alcohol does not add to fullness or nutrients, and may impair your judgment around portion sizes and food choices.

HEALTHY PROTEIN

One of the challenges when eating healthy is feeling hungry too soon after meals. If you're not eating the right mix of foods, you might feel unsatisfied, leading to cravings or overeating later. The good news? Choosing the right balance of protein, high fiber carbs (like fruits and vegetables), and healthy fats can help you stay full and energized for longer.

Protein: The Hunger Fighter

Protein is one of the most important nutrients for keeping you full and satisfied. Unlike quick-digesting foods that leave you hungry soon after eating, protein takes longer to break down, helping you stay full for hours. It also supports muscle strength, metabolism, and helps your body recover after exercise or daily activities.



A palm is about a 3–4 oz portion of protein

How Protein Helps You Stay Full

- **Slows Digestion –** Protein takes longer to digest than carbs, keeping you full longer.
- **Regulates Hunger Hormones –** Eating enough protein helps control hunger hormones, reducing cravings.
- **Supports Muscle Health –** Protein helps maintain and build muscle.
- **Prevents Energy Crashes –** When paired with healthy fats and fiber, protein helps keep your blood sugar steady.

HEALTHY FATS

Healthy Fats: The Satiety Booster

Fat often gets a bad reputation, but the truth is healthy fats are essential for feeling full, energized, and satisfied. They slow digestion, help absorb important vitamins, and provide long-lasting energy. When you include healthy fats in your meals, you're less likely to feel hungry soon after eating.

How Healthy Fats Help You Stay Full

- **Slows Digestion –** Fat takes longer to break down, keeping you full between meals.
- **Supports Hormone Balance –** Healthy fats are needed for hormone production, including those that control hunger.
- **Keeps Blood Sugar Steady –** When eaten with protein and fiber, fats help prevent energy crashes and cravings.
- **Boosts Nutrient Absorption –** Vitamins A, D, E, and K are fat-soluble, meaning your body needs fat to absorb them properly.

Common Mistakes with Fat

✓ Avoiding Fats Completely

Some people believe that eating fat will make them gain weight, but healthy fats are essential for feeling full, absorbing nutrients, and keeping your body working properly. If you completely cut out fats, you might:

- Feel hungry soon after eating
- Have trouble absorbing important vitamins
- Experience dry skin, brittle hair, or low energy

✓ Eating Too Much Fat

While healthy fats are good for you, they are also very calorie-dense. Eating too much can lead to excess calorie intake without realizing it. Common examples include:

- Using too much oil when cooking
- Eating large amounts of nuts or nut butter
- Adding avocado, cheese, and oils all in one meal

✓ Choosing Less Healthy Fats

Not all fats are created equal. Unhealthy trans fats and excessive saturated fats can increase the risk of heart disease and inflammation. These fats are often found in:

- Fried foods (French fries, fried chicken)
- Processed snacks (chips, packaged baked goods)
- Fast food and some restaurant meals

HIGH FIBER CARBOHYDRATES

Carbohydrates: The Main Energy Source

Carbohydrates, or carbs, are often misunderstood. Some people believe they should be avoided, but the truth is that carbs are the body's main fuel source. They give you the energy to move, think, and function throughout the day. While dieting, many people restrict their carbs thinking they will lose more weight. The key is choosing the high-fiber carbs that can keep you full, energized, and healthy.

Choosing carbs like fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains, can help you feel your best and support your long-term health.

What Carbs Do For You

- **Provide Energy –** Carbs are broken down into glucose, which your body uses for fuel, especially during cardiovascular exercise.
- **Support Digestion –** Fiber-rich carbs help with digestion and keep you feeling full longer.
- **Boost Brain Function –** Your brain runs on glucose, making carbs important for focus and concentration.
- **Prevent Energy Crashes –** The right, high-fiber carbs provide steady energy instead of quick highs and lows.

SIMPLE & COMPLEX CARBOHYDRATES

Not all carbs are the same! There are two main types: simple carbohydrates and complex carbohydrates. Understanding the difference can help you make better food choices and keep your energy levels steady throughout the day. While both types provide fuel for your body, they affect your blood sugar and hunger in different ways.

Simple Carbohydrates

Simple carbs are quickly broken down by the body, leading to fast energy but also blood sugar spikes and crashes. While some simple carbs (like some fruit and dairy) provide important nutrients, many processed simple carbs lack fiber and don't keep you full for long. These include foods like white bread, sugary snacks, soda, and fruit juice.

Complex Carbohydrates

Complex carbs are packed with fiber, vitamins, and minerals that slow down digestion and improve overall health. These complex carbs provide steady energy and keep you fuller for longer. These include whole grains (brown rice, quinoa, whole wheat), beans, lentils, and starchy vegetables (sweet potatoes, corn, peas). They also include nonstarchy vegetables and some fruits.

As you follow your daily meal plan, opt for more complex carbs over simple ones. Complex carbs can help maintain energy, manage hunger, and keep blood sugar stable. When eating simple carbs, pairing them with protein or healthy fat can help slow digestion and prevent sugar spikes.

What are your thoughts and beliefs about carbohydrates?

FIBER FACTS

When you hear the word carbohydrates, you might think of bread, rice, or fruit. But there's one part of carbohydrates that deserves special attention—fiber. It's a type of carbohydrate that your body can't digest, but that's actually a good thing!

What Is Fiber?

Fiber comes from plant foods, like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, and seeds. Because our bodies can't break it down, it travels through your digestive system and does important work along the way.

Why Is Fiber So Important?

Fiber has many jobs that help support your body:

- **Keeps You Full Longer –** Fiber takes up space in your stomach and slows digestion. That means you'll feel more satisfied after meals, and be less likely to feel hungry after a meal.
- **Helps With Weight Management –** Foods high in fiber tend to be lower in calories but still very filling. That's a great combo when you're working on managing weight.
- **Supports Digestion –** Fiber helps your body stay regular and can prevent constipation. It's like a gentle broom that sweeps through your digestive tract.
- **Stabilizes Blood Sugar –** Because fiber slows down how quickly your body absorbs sugar, it helps prevent big blood sugar spikes and crashes. That helps you feel more stable and energized after meals.
- **Lowers Cholesterol –** Certain types of fiber can help lower "bad" cholesterol, which protects your heart over time.

Where Can You Find Fiber?

Look for fiber in:

- Whole fruits and vegetables (especially ones with skin or seeds)
- Whole grains like oatmeal, brown rice, and 100% whole wheat bread
- Beans, lentils, and peas
- Nuts and seeds

Tip: Processed foods often have the fiber removed, so focus on whole, less-processed foods when you can.

A Gentle Reminder

If you haven't been eating much fiber, add it slowly. Too much at once can cause gas or bloating. And don't forget to drink more water—fiber needs fluid to do its job well!

ACTIVITY 1.1: HEALTHY FOODS

As you prepare your weekly grocery list, it's helpful to have "go to" foods that you can lean on in each category. Write your "go to" foods in the spaces below.

Healthy Protein

Whole Grains and Starchy Vegetables

Nonstarchy Vegetables

Fruits

Choosing Foods to Fill Your Healthy Plate

Fruits and vegetables get their colors from different nutrients. Aim to eat every color throughout the day and week to get them all.

Choose More Often

- ✓ Vegetables
- ✓ Whole grains
- ✓ Fruits
- ✓ Low-fat dairy
- ✓ Fish
- ✓ Legumes
- ✓ Nuts

Choose Less Often

- X Red meats
- X Processed meats
- X Refined grains
- X Sugar sweetened foods and drinks
- X Salt

MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR GUT

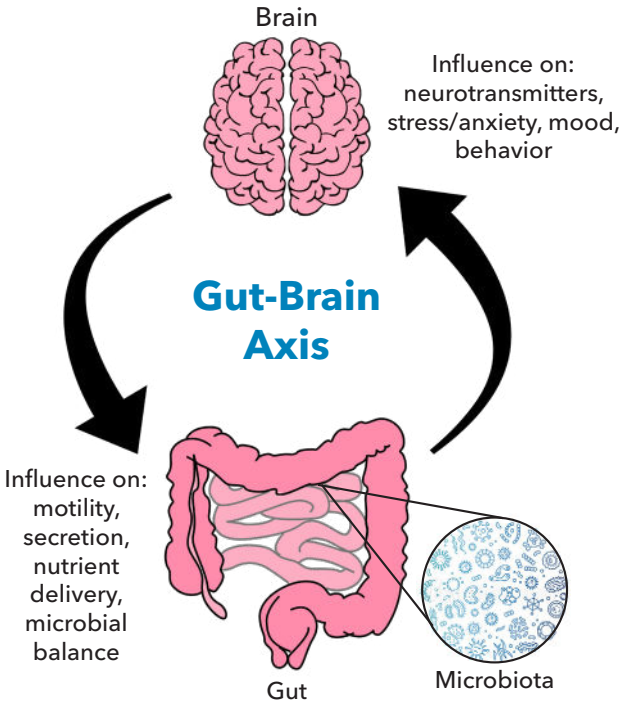
You might not think much about your gut, but it plays a big role in your health. Your gut isn't just your stomach, it's your whole digestive system, and it's home to something very important: your microbiome.

What's a Microbiome?

Your microbiome is a community of tiny living things (mostly bacteria) that live in your gut. These good bacteria help your body:

- Break down food
- Absorb nutrients
- Support your immune system
- Even boost your mood!

Think of them like helpful roommates. When you take care of them, they take care of you.



How Can You Keep Your Gut Happy?

1. Eat More Fiber (Prebiotics)

Fiber is food for your good gut bacteria. They love fiber from:

- Whole grains
- Fruits and vegetables
- Beans and lentils
- Nuts and seeds

2. Try Probiotic Foods

Probiotics are live, helpful bacteria found in fermented foods like:

- Yogurt with live cultures
- Kefir
- Sauerkraut
- Kimchi
- Miso
- Kombucha

3. Limit Processed Foods, Alcohol, and Added Sugar

These can throw off the balance in your gut and let the "unhelpful" bacteria grow too much.

4. Stay Active

Movement helps your gut work better and supports a healthy microbiome.

4. Manage Stress

Believe it or not, stress affects your gut. Activities like deep breathing, journaling, walking, or talking to someone can help.

Why It Matters

Adding more fiber and probiotic foods–slowly and gently–can help you feel less bloated, stay regular, improve the health of your microbiome, and improve how you feel overall.

NUTRIENT DIGESTION

How Fast Does Your Body Use Different Nutrients?

Your body digests different types of nutrients at different speeds. This matters because it affects how full you feel, how quickly energy is used, and how long that energy lasts.

Here's a quick look at the four main sources of calories:.

NUTRIENT	DIGESTION SPEED	CALORIES PER GRAM	NOTES
Carbohydrates	Fast	4 calories/gram	Main source of quick energy. Simple carbs (like sugar) digest faster than complex carbs (like fruits, vegetables and whole grains).
Protein	Medium	4 calories/gram	Helps repair muscles and keeps you full longer.
Fat	Slow	9 calories/gram	Takes the longest to digest. Helps you feel full but is higher in calories.

Why This Matters

Calorie density means how many calories are in a certain amount of food.

- Carbs give fast energy, but without protein or fat, they can leave you hungry again soon.
- Protein and fat digest more slowly, helping you stay full and balanced for longer.

Eating a mix of protein, healthy fats, and fiber-rich carbs can help keep your energy steady and support weight management.

ALCOHOL: Alcohol adds calories (7 calories/gram) to your diet, but it does not give your body helpful nutrients like protein, fiber, vitamins, or minerals. Your body uses alcohol first for energy, which can slow down how it uses fat and carbohydrates.

Research suggests there is no completely safe amount of alcohol. If you choose to drink, keep your intake low: no more than 1–2 drinks per day for most people.

PAIRING MACRONUTRIENTS

The Key to Satiety

To feel your best, it's important to pair carbohydrates, proteins, and healthy fats (macronutrients) in your meals. Each macronutrient has a different role in the body, and they each break down at a different rate. When you eat them together, they work as a team to keep you full longer, give you steady energy, and help your body function properly.

Why Is Pairing Macronutrients Important?

When you eat carbohydrates by themselves (like a piece of fruit or a slice of bread), your body digests them after a big spike blood sugar drops rapidly causing an energy crash.

But when you add protein and healthy fats, this slows down the increase in blood sugar, helping sustain energy levels for longer. This helps you stay full and keeps your energy levels steady.

How to Pair Macronutrients in Your Meals

BREAKFAST

Whole grain toast (carb) + poached eggs (protein) + avocado (fat)

SNACK

Apple (carb) + nonfat Greek yogurt (protein) + peanut butter (fat)

LUNCH

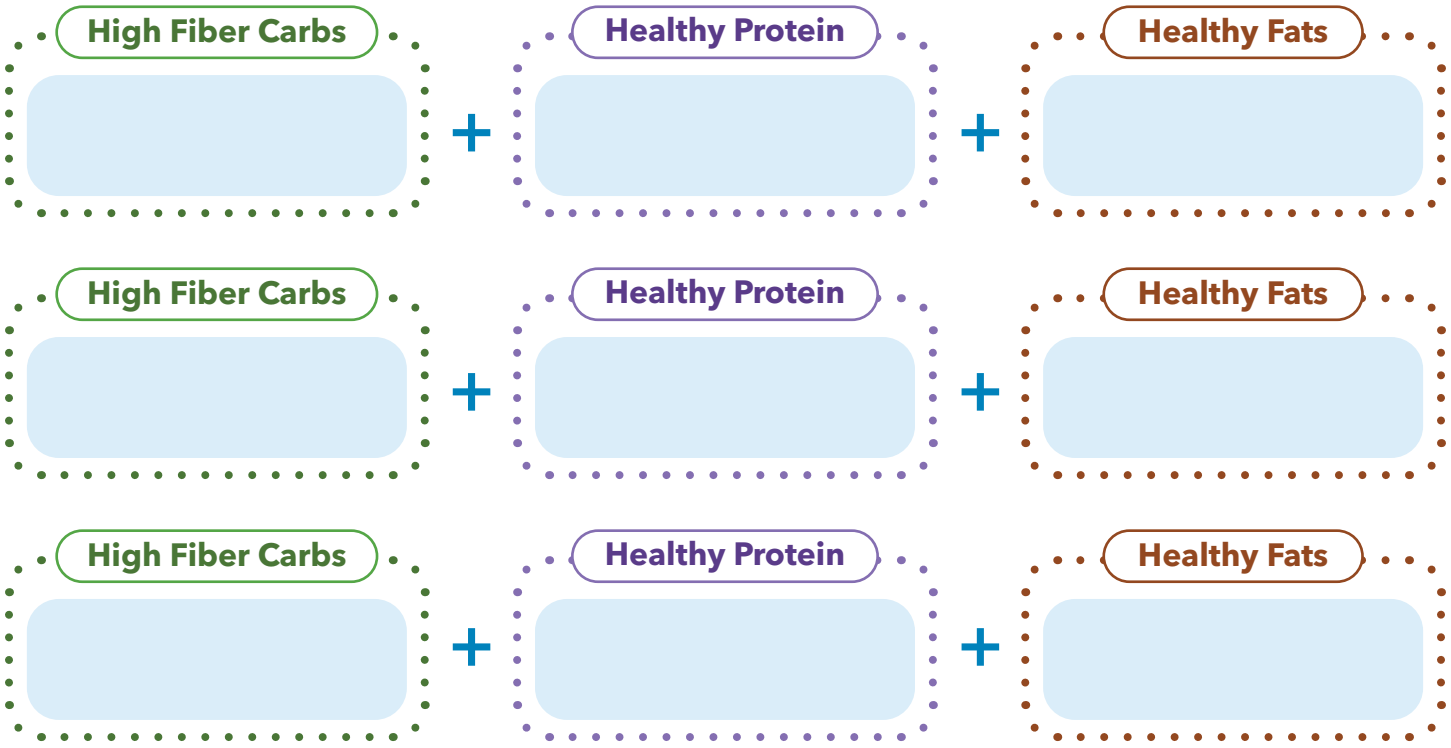
Grilled chicken (protein) + quinoa (carb) + olive oil dressing on a salad (fat)

DINNER

Salmon (protein + fat) + roasted sweet potatoes (carb) + steamed vegetables (fiber)

ACTIVITY 1.2: PAIRING MACRONUTRIENTS

Pairing carbs, protein, and healthy fats together helps keep you full longer and prevents energy crashes. For this activity, look at the list of foods earlier in this workbook and create at least three balanced food combinations that ideally include all three macronutrients.



1. Which combinations sound the most satisfying to you?

2. How do you think these foods would make you feel compared to eating just one food group (like carbs) alone?

3. Can you think of any other macronutrient pairings using foods you already enjoy?

ENERGY BALANCE

CALORIES IN

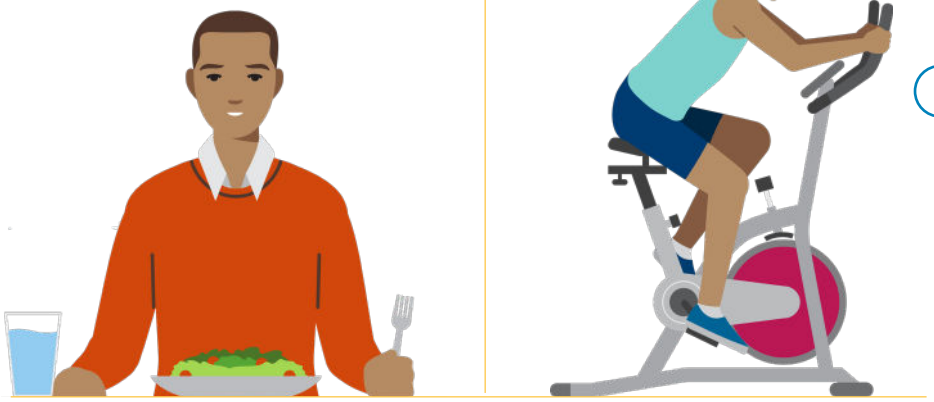
A measure of the energy in the things you eat and drink.

- Carbohydrates
- Protein
- Fat
- Alcohol

CALORIES OUT

A measure of the energy burned by the things you do.

- Normal body functions
- Digestion
- Daily activity
- Exercise



You can affect your health by focusing on both calories in and calories out

Finding the Right Balance

The goal is to find a balance where the calories you eat (IN) match the calories your body uses (OUT) for your current needs and goals:

- If **calories in = calories out**, your weight stays the same.
- If **calories in > calories out**, you gain weight.
- If **calories in < calories out**, you lose weight.

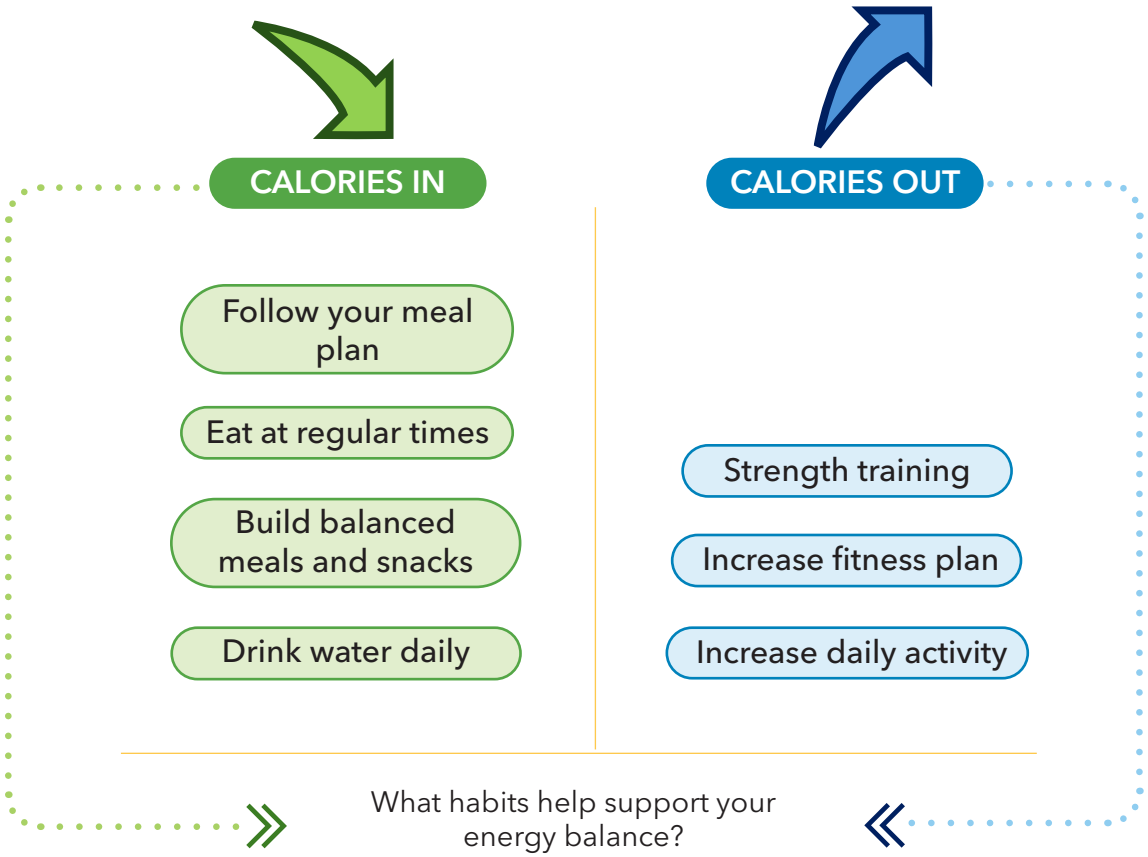
When you are losing weight, you are eating less energy than you are expending. That helps you lose fat (and sometimes a little muscle).

IMPORTANT: Energy balance is not about "earning" food or "burning off" one meal. Your body needs fuel for daily life and exercise. Exercise works best when your body is well fueled.

ENERGY BALANCE

How Can You Best Support Your Body

You can't change everything about your body, but you can support it with the habits and choices you practice each day. Your hunger, energy, weight, and routine may shift over time, and that can feel confusing. Focus on steady behaviors that help your body feel and function better. Small, consistent choices can make a big difference.



How Can You Support Your Meal Plan?

- Use your meal replacements as directed.
- Eat your planned meals at regular times. Include protein, vegetables, and fiber-rich carbs at meals.
- Choose portions that help you feel satisfied, not overly full.
- Drink water throughout the day.

How Can Movement Support Your Body?

- Build muscle with strength training.
- Move most days of the week in a way that feels doable.
- Add daily activity, like walking, taking the stairs, or stretching.
- Fuel your body for harder exercise.
- Give your body time to rest and recover.

CALORIE DENSITY

Understanding Calorie Density

Not all foods are created equal! Some foods provide more calories in smaller portions, while others have fewer calories in larger portions. This idea is called calorie density.

What Is Calorie Density?

Calorie density means how many calories are in a certain amount of food.

- **High-calorie-dense foods** have a lot of calories in a small portion.
  Example: chips, cheese, candy, oil, fast food
- **Low-calorie-dense foods** have fewer calories in a larger portion.
  Example: fruits, vegetables, beans, broth-based soups

You can eat a big plate of low-calorie-dense food and feel full, without eating too many calories. That's why these foods are helpful!

Why It Matters

When you're trying to balance calories in vs. calories out, low-calorie-dense foods give you more volume—so your plate feels full, and your stomach does too. These foods often have more fiber, water, and nutrients, which help with digestion and energy.

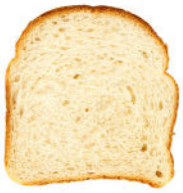
High-calorie-dense foods are not "bad," but they're easier to overeat without realizing it. That's why it helps to enjoy them in smaller amounts or pair them with lower-calorie foods.

Example: What 100 Calories Looks Like

3 cups of spinach

3 cups air popped popcorn

2 cups strawberries



1 slice white bread

5 potato chips

12-14 almonds

ACTIVITY 1.3: HIGH OR LOW CALORIE DENSITY

Look at the list of foods below. Circle the ones you think are high in calorie density.

ALMONDS	AVOCADO	BROWN RICE
WATERMELON	CANDY BAR	SODA
FRIED CHICKEN	BAKED POTATO	CARROTS
BROCCOLI	OLIVE OIL	DELI SALAMI
CHEESE	ICE CREAM	GREEK YOGURT
POPCORN (air popped)	HUMMUS	BUTTERED TOAST

1. What surprised you about this list?

2. Are there low-calorie-dense foods you enjoy and could eat more often?

3. How might this information help you build meals or snacks that keep you full?

ANSWER KEY: *Almonds, fried chicken, cheese, avocado, candy bar, olive oil, ice cream, soda (low volume, high sugar), buttered toast, deli salami, hummus (nutrient-rich, but calorie-dense in larger portions)*

EATING HEALTHFULLY

TIPS FOR DRINKING WATER

Drinking water is one of the simplest and most important things you can do for your health. Water helps your body digest food, carry nutrients, and get rid of waste. It also keeps your joints moving, your skin healthy, and your brain working well. When you're not getting enough water, you might feel tired, dizzy, or even think you're hungry when you're really just thirsty. Staying hydrated helps you feel better and supports your weight management goals.

- Drink plenty of water each day.
- Try caffeine-free unsweetened tea.
- Keep a water bottle or cup at work for easy refills.
- Choose sparkling, calorie-free options.
- Add a splash of fruit juice to add flavor.
- Infuse water overnight in the refrigerator by adding fruit, vegetables, and herbs or extracts for flavor.

GROCERY SHOPPING

Making the Store Less Overwhelming

The grocery store can feel like a maze, especially when you're trying to shop for healthy foods after the meal replacement program. But with a little planning, you can make it easier on yourself and feel more confident.

1. Don't Shop Hungry

When you're hungry, everything in the store can seem tempting, especially those less nutritious foods. Try to have a small snack or meal before you go. Drinking water can also help you stay focused.

2. Make a Simple List

Having a list saves time and keeps you on track. You don't need anything fancy—just a basic plan for meals and snacks for a few days. Include your favorite go-to items like:

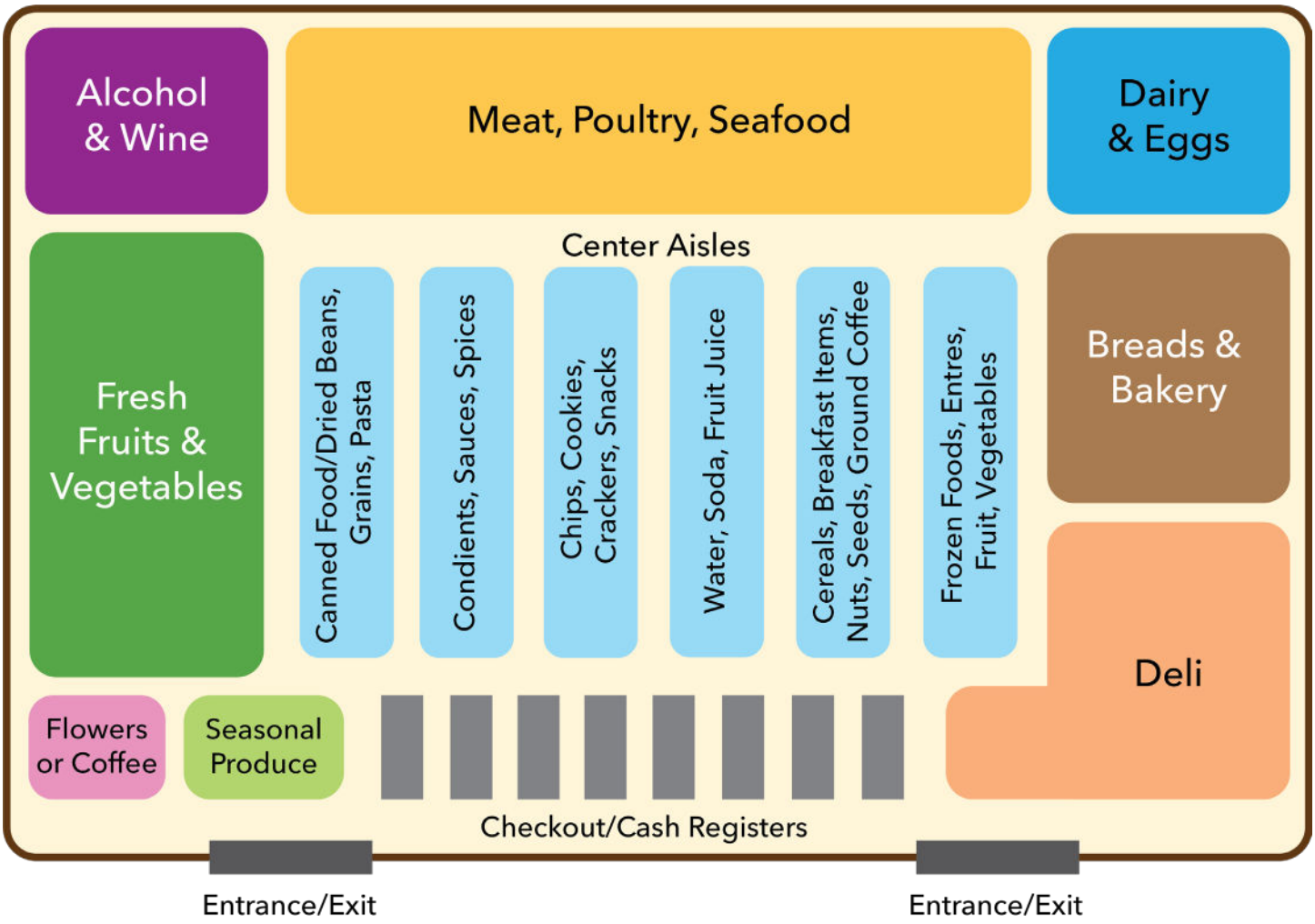
- Washed and ready vegetables
- Lean proteins (chicken, tofu, fish)
- High-fiber snacks (like popcorn, berries, or nuts)
- Whole grains (like brown rice or quinoa)

3. Know the Store's Tricks

Grocery stores are designed to make you buy more than you need. Here are some tricks to watch out for:

- **The perimeter:** This is where you'll find most of the fresh, healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, and seafood.
- **The middle aisles:** This is where more packaged and processed foods are kept. Stick to your list here and use your label-reading skills to pick the best options.
- **The endcaps and checkout line:** These are filled with snacks, candy, and drinks meant to tempt you while you wait. If these feel hard to resist, stay focused on your list or even shop online or use curbside pickup.

NAVIGATING THE GROCERY STORE



How Can You Shop for Healthy Foods?

Most of the fresh, healthy foods are found around the outside edges, or perimeter, of the store. This is where you'll find:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Lean meats and seafood
- Eggs and dairy (like milk and yogurt)
- Fresh bakery items (choose whole grain when you can)

These foods are usually less processed and closer to their natural form, which helps you build meals that are satisfying and balanced.

Tip for navigating the grocery store: Start your shopping trip by walking the outer edges first. Fill your cart with these healthy basics before heading into the middle aisles for extras like canned beans, whole grains, or spices.

SUPPORTING YOURSELF WHILE DINING OUT

How Do You Make Healthy Choices at Restaurants and Social Occasions?

Eating out and social events can still fit into your plan. The goal is not to be perfect, but to make choices that support your progress. Restaurants often offer larger portions, richer foods, and more distractions than eating at home. The smells, sights, and social setting can make it harder to notice when you are full. Planning ahead can help you enjoy the meal while still feeling steady and supported.

Dining Out

Do some homework. Most restaurants post menus online, so review them in advance. Look for lean protein that isn't fried or breaded or for a vegetarian option. Choose foods that are grilled or broiled. These are usually low-fat cooking methods.

Choose vegetables instead of starch. Ask for a side of nonstarchy vegetables instead of fries, potatoes, pasta, or chips.

Share or take it to go. Ask for a to-go container at the start of your meal or share a meal.

Don't try to keep up with others. Restaurant portions are huge! Don't worry about how much or how quickly others are eating. Listen to your stomach and stop eating at the first sign you're full.

Practice mindful eating. Before eating, take a few deep breaths and set a positive intention for the meal.

What other tips do you have?

Eating At a Party

Don't camp out at the food table. If you stay near the food, you're destined to eat more. It's just human nature. Find somewhere else to stand and chat.

Look before you eat. Scan the whole table before putting anything on your plate so you don't fill up on the first food you see.

Focus on lean protein and vegetables. Look for foods like shrimp with cocktail sauce, grilled chicken skewers, or roasted vegetables.

Enjoy the company. Focus on the guests and the experience, not on the food.

Bring a healthy dish! This will make sure there's something healthy that you can enjoy.

What other tips do you have?

HEALTHY FAST FOOD

How Do You Eat Healthy When Eating Out?

- Find a fast-casual spot and build a bowl with beans or chicken and vegetables for healthier fast food.
- Choose healthy side options, like salad, vegetables or fruit.
- Look up the nutrition information online before you go.
- Choose smaller portion sizes of items that are less healthy.
- Share larger servings with someone else.
- Request healthy swaps to menu items, like grilled chicken instead of beef.
- Ask for sauces and dressings on the side.
- Put part of large servings in a to-go container before you start eating.
- Use lemon juice, vinegar, salsa, or light oil-based salad dressing.
- Drink water or unsweetened iced tea with your meal.

Menu Words

How Do You Decide Which Meal is Healthy?

Choose More Often

- ✓ Baked
- ✓ Boiled
- ✓ Braised
- ✓ Broiled
- ✓ Grilled
- ✓ Fresh
- ✓ Poached
- ✓ Roasted
- ✓ Seared
- ✓ Steamed

Choose Less Often

- X Aioli
- X Alfredo
- X Au gratin
- X Battered
- X Bisque
- X Breaded
- X Crispy
- X Fried
- X Hollandaise/ Béarnaise
- X Sautéed
- X Smothered

ACTIVITY 1.4: USING THE MEAL PLAN

Look at the plate with a cheeseburger and fries. Now imagine you're hungry and ready to eat. What are some changes you could make to create a plate closer to your meal plan?

Write down the changes you could make to this plate to make it closer to your meal plan.

REFLECTION

When you've tried to follow an eating plan in the past, what did you find challenging?

How do you feel about your current eating habits? Are there any small changes you'd like to make?

NOTES

02

THE POWER OF MOVEMENT

GENERAL TYPES OF MOVEMENT

Your body benefits from different types of movement. Each one plays a unique role in keeping you strong, healthy, and able to move with ease.

Cardio (Heart Health)

Activities that raise your heart rate and improve endurance

Examples: walking, biking, swimming

Daily Activity (Everyday Movement)

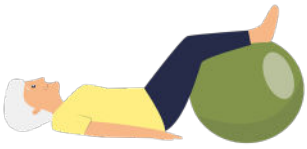
Movement you do throughout the day

Examples: chores, taking the stairs, walking at work

Flexibility (Mobility & Range of Motion)

Movements that help your muscles stay loose and flexible

Examples: stretching, yoga



Strength (Muscle Support)

Exercises that build and maintain muscle

Examples: lifting weights, resistance bands, bodyweight exercises

Balance (Stability & Control)

Exercises that improve coordination and prevent falls

Examples: standing on one foot, tai chi

For fitness resources, scan the QR codes or visit:

positivechoice.org/fitnessvideos

youtube.com/@positivechoice

Fitness Videos

PC YouTube

MOVE MORE

Being active is one of the best ways to take care of your body and mind. Moving regularly helps your heart stay strong, keeps your muscles and joints working well, and boosts your metabolism. It also gives you more energy, improves your mood, lowers stress, and helps you manage your weight over time. Exercise isn't just about workouts, it's about finding ways to move every day in a way that feels natural and fun.

Many people see exercise as something they have to do, but changing how you think about movement can make a big difference. Staying active can be something you want to do, like stretching in the morning, walking with a friend, dancing to your favorite song, or choosing the stairs instead of the elevator. The key is to find activities that make you feel good and fit into your daily life.

Movement and Weight Management

Staying active helps with weight management in more ways than just burning calories. Movement keeps your metabolism working well, helps control hunger, and makes it easier to maintain your progress over time. Instead of thinking of exercise as something you have to do to "burn off" food or earn the right to eat, it helps to see it as a tool that keeps your body strong and balanced.

Often getting started with movement is the hardest part. Once you find something you enjoy, tend not to avoid, and can do regularly, you may find that it becomes easier and more enjoyable over time.

Cardio exercises like walking, swimming, or biking help your body use stored energy and keep your blood sugar steady, which can prevent cravings and overeating.

Stretching and gentle movement, like yoga or simple exercises, may not seem connected to weight management, but they help in big ways. They keep your muscles loose, reduce stiffness, and make it easier to keep up with other activities. When movement feels good, you're more likely to stay active!

Instead of using exercise to "make up for" eating, it's better to think of movement as a way to take care of your body. Focusing on weight loss for physical movement leads to less physical activity and less benefits received from physical activity done. The best plan includes different types of movement—cardio for heart health, strength training to keep muscles strong, and flexibility exercises to stay comfortable and injury-free. The goal is to find activities you enjoy, so staying active becomes a lifelong habit, not just a short-term fix.

HOW MOVEMENT BENEFITS YOUR BODY

Your body is built to move, and when you stay active, everything works better. From improving your energy and mood to keeping your heart, muscles, and joints strong, movement supports nearly every part of your health. Even small amounts of daily activity can make a big difference in how you feel and function.

Boosts Energy

It might seem like movement would make you tired, but it actually does the opposite! When you move, your heart pumps more oxygen-rich blood through your body, giving your muscles and brain the fuel they need to stay alert. Even a short walk can wake you up and help you feel more focused throughout the day.

Strengthens Your Heart and Lungs

Your heart is a muscle, and just like any muscle, it gets stronger when you use it. Activities like walking, running, swimming, or biking make your heart beat faster, helping it work more efficiently. Stronger heart and lungs mean you can climb stairs, carry groceries, or go on long walks without feeling out of breath.

Improves Mood and Reduces Stress

Ever notice how you feel better after a walk or stretching? That's because movement releases endorphins, also known as "feel-good" chemicals in your brain. Regular activity can help lower stress, reduce anxiety, and even improve sleep. When you move more, you often feel happier and more in control of your day.

Helps You Sleep Better

Movement helps your body relax, making it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep through the night. People who move more during the day tend to have deeper, more restful sleep. Just be sure not to exercise too close to bedtime, or your body might be too energized to wind down.

Helps Keep Blood Sugar in Balance

Moving your body helps control blood sugar levels and keeps them steady. When you exercise, your muscles use sugar from your blood for energy, which helps lower blood sugar over time. It also makes your body better at using insulin, the hormone that helps control blood sugar. This is important for staying healthy and lowering the risk of diabetes. Even simple activities, like taking a walk after meals, can help your body process sugar more easily.

Keeps Your Muscles and Joints Healthy

If you don't move your body regularly, your muscles can get weak and your joints can feel stiff. Stretching and movement keep your body flexible and strong, making everyday activities—like bending, lifting, and reaching—easier. Staying active also helps prevent aches and pains as you get older.

Supports Brain Health and Focus

Exercise isn't just good for your body, it's good for your brain, too! Movement increases blood flow to the brain, which helps with memory, focus, and learning new things. That's why taking movement breaks can help you feel sharper and more productive throughout the day.

CARDIO: MOVING FOR A STRONG HEART

What Is Cardio?

Cardio, or cardiovascular exercise, is any activity that makes your heart beat faster and your breathing heavier. Walking, biking, hiking, swimming, dancing, and even playing sports are all forms of cardio.

Why It Matters

- Strengthens your heart and lungs, making everyday activities easier
- Helps improve endurance so you don't get tired as quickly
- Helps with weight management
- Lowers the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes
- Boosts energy and improves mood

For more guidance, see Weekly Fitness Goals on page 60.

Guidelines for Cardio

- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity (see pg. 53 for intensity) activity per week (like brisk walking) or 75 minutes of vigorous activity (like jogging or jumping rope).
- You can break it into smaller sessions; 10 minutes at a time counts!
- If you're just starting out, focus on low-impact activities like walking or swimming and build up gradually.

How to Get Started & Ease In

- **Start small –** Try a 10-minute walk and slowly increase your time.
- **Make it fun –** Listen to music or walk with a friend.
- **Mix it up –** Try different activities like biking, dancing, or hiking.
- **Go at your own pace –** You should be able to talk, but not sing, while moving.

DAILY ACTIVITY: MOVING MORE

What Is Daily Activity?

Daily activity includes any movement that isn't a structured workout. Things like walking to the store, taking the stairs, gardening, or playing with your kids all count.

Why It Matters

- Keeps your body active even if you don't have time for a workout
- Burns extra calories and supports heart health
- Helps reduce stiffness from sitting too much
- Makes everyday tasks feel easier
- Boosts energy and improves mood

For more guidance, see Weekly Fitness Goals on page 60.

Guidelines for Daily Activity

- Move as often as possible throughout the day. Strive towards 10,000 steps.
- Avoid long periods of sitting—stand up and stretch every hour.
- Find small ways to be more active—every little bit adds up!

How to Get Started & Ease In

- **Take movement breaks –** Stand up and stretch every 30-60 minutes.
- **Walk whenever you can –** Park farther away, take the stairs, or do a lap around your home.
- **Turn chores into exercise –** Vacuuming, gardening, and cleaning all count as movement!
- **Make it fun –** Dance while cooking, play with your pet, or walk while listening to a podcast or music.

FLEXIBILITY: KEEPING YOUR BODY MOBILE

What Is Flexibility?

Flexibility means how easily your muscles and joints move. Stretching, yoga, and simple mobility exercises help improve flexibility, making movement easier and reducing stiffness.

Why It Matters

- Helps prevent injury by keeping muscles and joints healthy
- Reduces stiffness and makes everyday movements easier
- Improves posture and balance
- Helps with recovery after other types of exercise
- Can reduce stress and tension in the body

For more guidance, see Weekly Fitness Goals on page 60.

Guidelines for Flexibility

- Stretch at least 2-3 times per week, but daily is even better.
- Hold each stretch for 10-30 seconds and avoid bouncing.
- Stretch after your body is warmed up (like after a short walk).

How to Get Started & Ease In

- **Start with simple stretches –** Try touching your toes or reaching overhead.
- **Focus on tight areas –** Many people have tight hamstrings (back of the legs) and shoulders.
- **Breathe deeply –** Relax into the stretch instead of forcing it.
- **Try a stretching routine before bed –** This can help with relaxation and sleep.

BALANCE: STAYING STEADY AND STABLE

What Is Balance?

Balance is your ability to stay steady while sitting, standing, walking, or moving. Good balance helps your body react to changes in movement and position, making everyday activities safer and easier.

Why It Matters

- Helps prevent falls and injuries
- Improves stability and confidence when moving
- Makes walking on uneven surfaces easier
- Supports coordination and posture
- Helps you stay independent as you age
- Can improve performance during exercise and daily activities

For more guidance, see Weekly Fitness Goals on page 60.

Guidelines for Balance

- Practice balance exercises at least 2–3 times per week
- Start with support nearby, like a chair or counter
- Focus on slow, controlled movements
- Wear supportive shoes and clear clutter from your space
- Stop if you feel dizzy or unsafe

How to Get Started & Ease In

- **Start with small exercises –** Try standing on one foot or walking heel-to-toe.
- **Use support when needed –** Hold onto a wall, chair, or countertop for safety.
- **Focus on posture –** Stand tall and look forward instead of down at your feet.
- **Practice during daily activities –** Balance on one leg while brushing your teeth or waiting in the kitchen while food cooks.
- **Combine balance with movement –** Tai chi, yoga, and walking can all help improve balance over time.

STRENGTH TRAINING: BOOST YOUR METABOLISM

Strength training, also known as resistance training, involves exercises that make your muscles work against a force, such as weights or your own body weight. This type of exercise is essential for building muscle strength, protecting bones and joints, and maintaining overall health.

Benefits of Strength Training

Engaging in regular strength training offers numerous advantages:

- **Increased Muscle Mass:** Helps counteract age-related muscle loss, keeping you stronger.
- **Stronger Bones:** Enhances bone density, reducing the risk of fractures.
- **Better Joint Flexibility:** Supports joint health, lowering the chance of injuries.
- **Improved Balance:** Decreases the likelihood of falls, especially as you age.
- **Weight Management:** Boosts metabolism, aiding in maintaining a healthy weight.
- **Enhanced Mental Health:** Can elevate mood and increase self-confidence.

Muscle Mass Decline with Age

As we grow older, our muscle mass naturally decreases:

- After age 30, individuals who don't engage in regular strength training can lose approximately 4 to 6 pounds of muscle per decade.
- Without intervention, this decline can accelerate, leading to a significant reduction in strength and mobility.

Helpful Strength Training Tips

Beginning a strength training routine can be straightforward:

- **Consult a Professional:** Before starting, talk to a doctor or fitness expert, especially if you have existing health conditions or concerns.
- **Start Light:** Use light weights or resistance bands to learn proper form and prevent injury.
- **Focus on Major Muscle Groups:** Include exercises that target legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms.
- **Maintain Regularity:** Aim for strength training sessions at least twice a week.
- **Progress Gradually:** As you become stronger, slowly increase the weight or resistance.

Remember, it's never too late to start strength training. You can strength train at any ability level and at any age. With consistency and proper technique, you can enjoy its numerous health benefits.

GETTING STARTED WITH STRENGTH

Starting strength training can feel overwhelming, especially if you've never done it before. The key is to start small and be consistent. You don't need fancy equipment or long workouts; just a few simple exercises can make a big difference over time.

Ease Into It

- If you're new to strength training, begin with bodyweight exercises like squats, wall push-ups, and modified planks on your knees. These movements build strength without the risk of heavy weights.
- Resistance bands are a great beginner-friendly tool that adds light resistance to exercises without putting stress on the joints.
- Start with 1 session per week, allowing at least a day of rest in between for muscle recovery.

Focus on Form Over Weight/Resistance

- Good technique is more important than lifting heavy. Proper form prevents injuries and ensures that you're working the right muscles.
- If you're unsure about your form, try using a mirror or recording yourself to check your movements.
- Slow, controlled movements are better than fast, messy reps. You'll get more out of each exercise.

For more guidance, see Weekly Fitness Goals on page 60.

Start Small and Build Up

- Begin with 1-2 sets of 8-12 reps per exercise at first.
- As you get stronger, gradually increase the resistance, number of reps, or sets.
- If you feel shaky or struggle to maintain good form, that's a sign to pause or reduce the intensity.

ACSM Guidelines

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) is a leading organization in exercise science and fitness recommendations. The recommendations below are the ultimate goal, but as you begin your strength training routine, it is recommended to start slowly.

Over time, it's important to increase the weight or difficulty (see pg. 53 for intensity) in order to get stronger. Their guidelines show that strength training helps keep muscles strong, boosts metabolism, and supports bone health, making it an important part of staying healthy and fit.

Guidelines for Strength Training

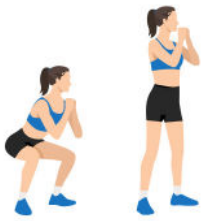
- Aim to do strength training at least 2 days each week.
- Work all the major muscle groups over the course of your routine.
- Begin with 2–3 sets per exercise.
- Use a resistance level that feels challenging but controlled.
- Increase weight, reps, or difficulty little by little as your body adapts.

TYPES OF STRENGTH TRAINING

Strength training isn't just about lifting heavy weights—there are different ways to build strength depending on your goals and fitness level. Some methods focus on using your own body weight, while others use equipment like dumbbells, resistance bands, or even explosive movements. Understanding the different types of strength training can help you choose the right approach for your body and keep your workouts fun and effective.

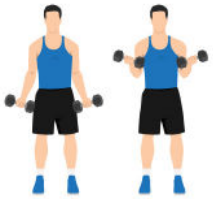
Bodyweight Training

Uses your own body as resistance (e.g., squats, push-ups, sit-ups)



Weightlifting

Uses dumbbells, barbells, kettlebells, or heavy items to build strength

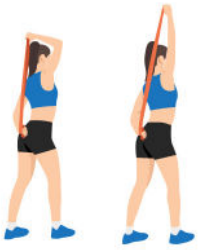


Isometric Training

Involves holding a position under tension without moving (e.g., wall sits, planks)

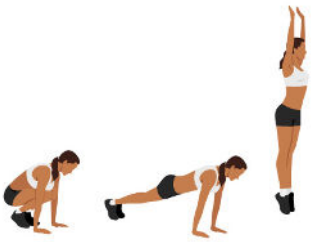
Resistance Band Training

Uses elastic bands to provide resistance and improve muscle endurance



Plyometric Training

Uses explosive movements like jump squats and burpees to build power



Circuit Training/Machines

Combines strength exercises with short rest periods to help facilitate a safe routine

ACTIVITY 2.1: WHERE DO YOU BEGIN?

Find Your Strength Training Starting Point

Before starting strength training, it's important to check in with your body and understand your current level of strength and mobility. Answer the questions below honestly to help you find the best starting point.

1. **Lower Body Strength & Mobility:**
   When moving from a seated to a standing position (without using your hands), how does it feel?
   - ☐ I can stand up easily and repeatedly without discomfort.
   - ☐ I can do it, but I feel some weakness or strain in my legs.
   - ☐ I struggle to stand up without using my hands for support.

2. **Upper Body Strength:**
   If you had to carry a full grocery bag or a heavy backpack for a few minutes, how would that feel?
   - ☐ No problem—I could carry it without effort.
   - ☐ I could do it, but I'd probably need to stop and adjust or take a break.
   - ☐ I would struggle to carry it comfortably for more than a few moments.

3. **Core & Stability:**
   If you had to hold a plank (on your hands or elbows, but not on your knees) for 15 seconds, how would it feel?
   - ☐ Doable—I might get tired, but I can hold it.
   - ☐ Difficult—I feel my core and arms shake after a few seconds.
   - ☐ Very hard or impossible—I would need a modified version like a wall plank.

4. **Balance & Coordination:**
   If you had to balance on one foot for 10 seconds, how would you do?
   - ☐ Easy—I can balance well without holding onto anything.
   - ☐ Doable—I can do it, but I feel a little wobbly.
   - ☐ Difficult—I need to hold onto something for stability.

How to Use Your Results:

- **Mostly first answers:** You likely have a solid foundation. You can start with bodyweight exercises and progress to using weights or resistance bands, as you feel comfortable.
- **A mix of first and second answers:** You may need to start with modified exercises (e.g., chair-assisted movements, wall push-ups) and gradually build up strength.
- **Mostly second and third answers:** Begin with low-impact and mostly modified strength training exercises, focusing on control and form before adding intensity or weights. You may want to seek out a personal trainer to ensure proper form and safety.

CALCULATING INTENSITY

How Hard Should I Work?

Moderate intensity up to vigorous intensity exercise is recommended in order to get all the benefits from exercise, whether it's cardio or strength training.

Rating of Perceived Exertion

There are a handful of ways to determine the intensity of your workout. One of these is called the Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) Scale.

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate how hard you feel you are working during exercise.

Activity Effort	Perceived Effort	Ability to Breathe, Talk
Very light	1	Anything other than sleeping.
Light	2-3	Easy to breathe and carry a conversation.
Moderate	4-6	Breathing harder; can hold a short conversation, but not sing.
Vigorous	7-8	Breathing heavily; can speak a sentence.
Very hard	9	Can barely breathe or speak a single word.
Maximum Effort	10	Completely out of breath; unable to talk.

Sing/Talk Test

MODERATE INTENSITY

You can still talk, somewhat breathless, but cannot sing.

VIGOROUS INTENSITY

You cannot say more than a few words without pausing for a breath.

METABOLISM BASICS

What is Metabolism?

Metabolism is the process your body uses to turn food into energy. It happens all the time, even when you're sleeping or resting. Your body needs energy to keep your heart beating, your lungs breathing, and your brain thinking.

Metabolism is made up of two main parts:

- **Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR) –** This is the number of calories your body burns just to keep you alive. Even if you did nothing but lie down all day, your body would still use energy to keep your organs working.
- **Activity, Exercise, and Digestion –** This includes all the calories burned from moving around, exercising, and even digesting food.

How Strength Training Helps Your Metabolism

Your metabolism is like your body's engine—it keeps everything running. The more muscle you have, the faster your engine works. This means your body burns more calories throughout the day, even when you're not exercising. While exercise in general is great for your body and mind, strength training specifically helps your metabolism in several ways.

Muscle Burns More Calories Than Fat

Even when you're resting, muscle tissue uses more energy than fat tissue. This means that the more muscle you have, the more calories your body burns throughout the day.

Strength Training and Cardio Create An After-burn Effect

After cardio, lifting weights or doing bodyweight exercises, your body continues to burn extra calories for hours as it repairs and strengthens muscles. This process is called excess post-exercise oxygen consumption (EPOC).

It Helps Prevent Metabolism Slowdown

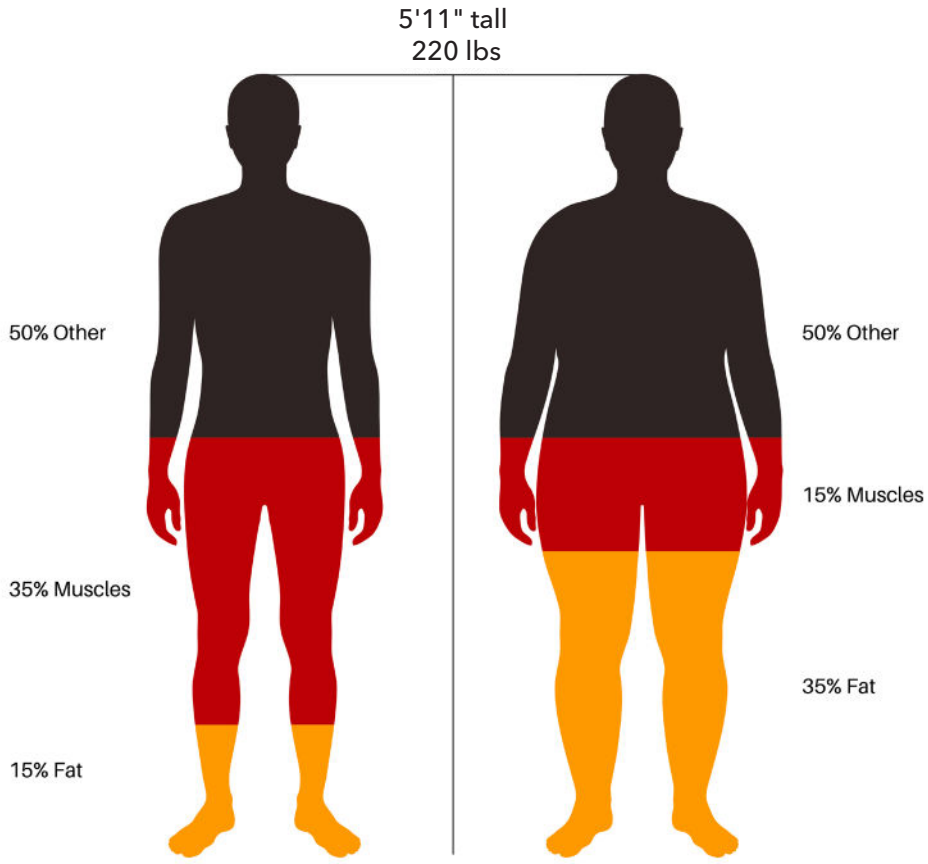
When you lose weight, your body may naturally slow down your metabolism to conserve energy. Strength training helps prevent this by maintaining or increasing muscle mass, keeping your metabolism active.

It Improves Insulin Sensitivity

Strength training helps your muscles use sugar from food more effectively, which can help regulate blood sugar levels and reduce the risk of weight regain.

BODY COMPOSITION

Body composition refers to the balance of muscle, fat, bone, and water in your body. Many people focus only on their weight, but body composition is a better way to measure health and progress. Two people can weigh the same but have very different body compositions: one may have more muscle and less fat, while the other may have more fat and less muscle.



Two individuals who are the same height and weight, but not the same body composition.

Focusing on body composition instead of just weight can help you stay motivated and recognize the benefits of strength training beyond just the number on the scale.

Strength training plays a huge role in improving body composition. It helps reduce body fat while increasing or maintaining muscle mass. This is important because having more muscle and less fat improves overall health, boosts metabolism, and gives you a stronger, leaner appearance. Even if the scale doesn't change much, strength training can make your body feel firmer, stronger, and more energized.

It's important to understand that changes in body composition might not always be reflected on the scale in the way people expect. Since muscle is denser than fat, you might gain muscle while losing fat, which could mean your weight stays the same or even increases slightly. However, your body will likely look and feel different. Clothes may fit better, and you may notice more definition and strength, even if the number on the scale doesn't move as much as you'd like. This is why focusing on how you feel, how your clothes fit, and your overall strength is more important than just relying on the scale.

MAINTAINING WEIGHT LOSS – THE ENERGY GAP

As you lose weight, your body often needs fewer calories than it did before. This is called the energy gap. It means your body may burn less energy, while hunger and cravings may still feel strong. This can feel confusing or unfair. But it is a normal body response, not a personal failure.

If Weight Loss Feels Hard

Your body is built to protect you. For most of human history, food was not always easy to find. When weight goes down, your body may respond as if it needs to save energy.

Your body may:

- Burn fewer calories than before
- Make you feel hungrier
- Make cravings feel stronger
- Make weight regain happen more easily

This is why maintenance is not just about willpower; your body is trying to keep you safe

What You Can Do?

As your body changes, your habits may need to change too.

Helpful habits include:

- Pay attention to portions
- Eat enough protein and fiber
- Keep regular meal times
- Plan for hunger and cravings
- Stay active most days
- Notice small weight changes early

Small changes can add up over time. A little more food, less movement, poor sleep, stress, or skipped meals can make weight regain more likely.

Why Muscle Matters

Movement helps with weight maintenance. Strength training is especially helpful because it helps you keep and build muscle.

Muscle uses more energy than fat, even at rest. This does not mean exercise cancels out food, but having more muscle can help support your metabolism over time.

If you want more flexibility with food, building muscle and staying active can help.

Try to:

- Walk or move most days
- Strength train 2–3 days per week
- Break up long periods of sitting
- Choose activities you can keep doing

Your Body Wants to Protect You

Even though we live in a world where food is more available, our bodies still have this survival system. So when you lose weight, your body thinks it might be in danger and tries to protect you by encouraging you to eat more and save energy.

This is why weight management can feel hard; it's not about willpower or doing something wrong. **It's your body doing what it was built to do.**

You can support your body by staying consistent with meals, movement, sleep, self-care, and regular check-ins with your habits. These tools can help you maintain your progress while staying on track with your goals.

COMMON CHALLENGES

Being active isn't always easy. Life can be busy, and sometimes your body doesn't feel up to it. Many people struggle with exercise for different reasons, but the good news is that there are ways to work through these challenges. Here are some common problems and simple ways to overcome them.

I Don't Have Time

It can feel like there's no time to exercise when you have work, family, and other things to do. But movement doesn't have to take a long time. Small changes like taking the stairs, walking during a phone call, or stretching while watching TV can make a big difference. Even 5-10 minutes of easy movement helps!

I Don't Feel Motivated

Some days, it's hard to want to move. Exercise can feel like a chore, especially if you don't enjoy it. The trick is to find fun ways to be active, like dancing, playing with a pet, riding a bike, or going for a hike. When movement is fun and enjoyable, you'll want to do it more!

I Feel Too Tired

When you're exhausted, exercise might be the last thing you want to do. But moving your body can actually give you more energy! Try gentle activities like stretching or a short walk to wake up your body and feel less tired.

I Have Pain or an Injury

If your body hurts, moving can feel scary. But the right kinds of exercise can help with pain by keeping your muscles and joints strong. Try gentle movements like swimming, water aerobics or water walking, stretching, or chair exercises. If something hurts, listen to your body and choose activities that feel good.

COMMON CHALLENGES

I Don't Know Where to Start

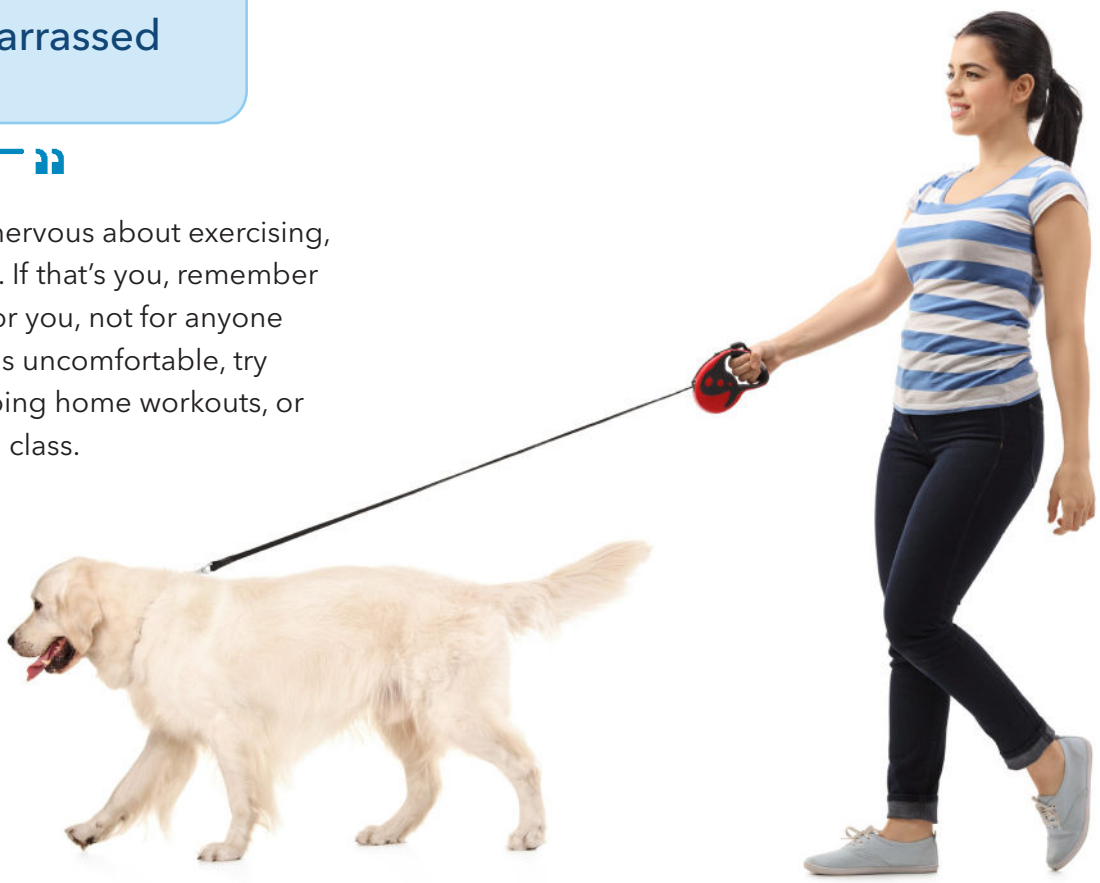
Starting a new routine can feel confusing. What's the best exercise? How long should you do it? The best way to start is *small*. A short walk, a few stretches, or light strength exercises can be a great beginning. Over time, you can add more movement that feels right for you.

The Weather is Bad

If it's too hot, too cold, or too rainy, it's hard to exercise outside. Try making a backup plan, like walking inside a mall, stretching at home, playing a workout-based videogame, or doing a simple workout indoors.

I Feel Embarrassed

Some people feel nervous about exercising, especially in public. If that's you, remember that movement is for you, not for anyone else. If the gym feels uncomfortable, try walking outside, doing home workouts, or finding a fun online class.



MAKING MOVEMENT FUN

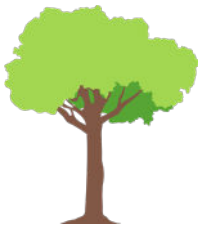
Moving your body doesn't have to mean going to the gym or doing a workout you don't enjoy. In fact, one of the best ways to stay active over time is to find movement that feels good and makes you happy. When movement is fun, you're more likely to keep doing it because it's something you look forward to, not something you "have to" do.

Make it Social

Some people enjoy movement more when they do it with others. Try going for walks with a friend, joining a dance or walking group, or doing a class together. Moving with others can be fun, and it also helps you stay motivated and connected.

Make it Playful

Think about what you liked doing as a kid, like jumping rope, dancing, roller skating, or playing tag. These types of movement still count as adults! You can play with your kids, play pickleball, try hula hooping, or even follow along to a silly dance video.



Try Nature-Based Movement

Being outdoors can make movement more enjoyable. Walking in the park, hiking a trail, biking around your neighborhood, or doing stretches outside can feel refreshing and peaceful. Nature can help lift your mood and reduce stress while you move.

Make it Relaxing

Not all movement has to be fast or intense. Some people feel their best with slow, gentle movement like stretching, yoga, or tai chi. These activities can help reduce stress, improve sleep, and make your body feel more relaxed.

Use Music or Podcasts

Listening to something you enjoy while moving–like upbeat music or an interesting podcast–can make the time go by quickly and make movement feel more fun.

Mix It Up

Doing the same thing every day can get boring. Try changing your routine now and then so you don't feel stuck. Try something new once in a while–even if it's just a 5-minute stretch you've never done before!

WEEKLY FITNESS PLAN

Use these weekly goals to gradually build a consistent and balanced exercise routine. See page 53 for calculating intensity.

WEEK 1: STRENGTH FREQUENCY

Focus on getting strength training consistently:

- *New to strength?* Start with 1–2 days
- *Already doing 1–2 days?* Add 1 more day
- *Doing 3+ days?* Keep it consistent this week

WEEK 2: BALANCE

Improve stability and injury prevention:

- Balance on one foot (use support as needed)
- Stand up from a chair without using your hands
- Include yoga or tai chi

WEEK 3: CARDIO ENDURANCE

Build endurance by adding time each week:

- *New to cardio?* Start with 5 minutes
- *Walking 30 minutes?* Add 5 more minutes
- *At 120 minutes/week?* Add 15–20 minute

WEEK 4: STRETCHING FOR MOBILITY

Add stretching after workouts or on rest days:

- *New to stretching?* Start with 1 day (5 minutes)
- *Stretching sometimes?* Add 1 more day or a few minutes
- *Stretching regularly?* Aim for 2–3 days per week

WEEK 5: CARDIO INTENSITY

Increase stamina and cardiovascular capacity:

- Add short bursts of faster pace
- Choose routes with hills or increase resistance
- Include intervals 1–2 days per week

WEEK 6: CARDIO FREQUENCY

Find ways to increase current cardio frequency:

- Add 1 more day of cardio
- Try a different type of cardio
- Combine different activities in the same week

WEEK 7: DAILY ACTIVITY

Find ways to increase daily movement:

- Park farther away or take the stairs
- Get up and move every hour
- Add short walks during the day

WEEK 8: STRENGTH INTENSITY

Build strength by increasing intensity:

- Increase weight or resistance
- Increase repetitions
- Progress to more challenging exercises

ACTIVITY 2.2: WHAT'S YOUR FITNESS PLAN?

Using this planner, create a fitness plan that will work for you!

1. **Choose Your Weekly Goal**
   How many days do you want to exercise this week?
   - ☐ 1 day
   - ☐ 2 days
   - ☐ 3 days
   - ☐ 4 days
   - ☐ 5 days
   - ☐ 6+ days

2. **Pick Your Exercise:**
   What type(s) of exercise sounds doable for you this week?
   - ☐ Cardio
   - ☐ Daily Activity
   - ☐ Flexibility
   - ☐ Strength Training

3. **How Will You Stay On Track?**
   - ☐ Set a reminder on my phone
   - ☐ Put it on my calendar
   - ☐ Ask someone to check in with me
   - ☐ Celebrate each time I follow through
   - ☐ Other idea: _____

4. **Why Does This Matter to You?**
   Take a moment to think about your why. What do you hope exercise will help you with?
   - ☐ Feeling stronger
   - ☐ Supporting weight management
   - ☐ Having more energy
   - ☐ Protecting my joints and bones
   - ☐ Improving mood or stress
   - ☐ Something else: _____

5. **Make a Plan:**
   Pick which days you'd like to exercise. (If you choose strength training, make sure you are resting at least 48 hours between strength workouts.)

Day	What will you do?	Where?	How long?	Time of day?
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

REFLECTION

How motivated are you to start an exercise routine? If you are ready to start, what do you expect to gain by doing it?

Consider what you can learn from your past experiences with exercise. Have there been times in your life when you were consistently active? What were you doing then that helped you be consistent? What lessons from your past might help you now?

What expectations about exercise are you holding onto that might be getting in your way right now? What would it look like to let go of those and start with what feels doable today?

NOTES

03
Building Lasting Habits

BUILDING LASTING HABITS

To make changes that last, you need to build new habits and sometimes replace old ones. This can take time, and at first, it might feel hard. That's normal! Learning something new always takes effort in the beginning.

Why Are Habits Important?

Habits help your brain save energy and time. If you had to think about every little decision each day, your brain would get tired very quickly! Habits:

What you do regularly is what leads to your results. Building helpful habits is the key to making lasting change.

Habits:

- Help you do things automatically
- Free up your brain to focus on other tasks
- Shape what you do every day

What you do regularly is what leads to your results. Building helpful habits is the key to making lasting change.

How Your Brain Builds Habits

Your brain is like a network of roads. These roads are called neural pathways. When you try something new, your brain builds a new road. The more you practice, the stronger that road becomes.

Over time, the habit becomes easier and more automatic. This is called neuroplasticity, which means your brain can learn and change. Think of it like a dirt path: the first time you walk it, it's hard to see. The more you walk it, the clearer and easier it becomes.

Why Change Can Feel Hard

Breaking old habits can be challenging because your brain likes to use the same "roads." It often runs on autopilot. New habits take more effort at first, require you to think more, and may feel uncomfortable. But with repetition, your brain starts to expect the new behavior, and it gets easier.

The Role of Rewards

Your brain loves rewards. When something feels good, your brain releases a chemical called dopamine. Dopamine helps you feel good and tells your brain, "Do this again!" That's why it's important to find ways to make new habits enjoyable early on.

How to Build a New Habit

A simple way to build habits is to remember three steps:

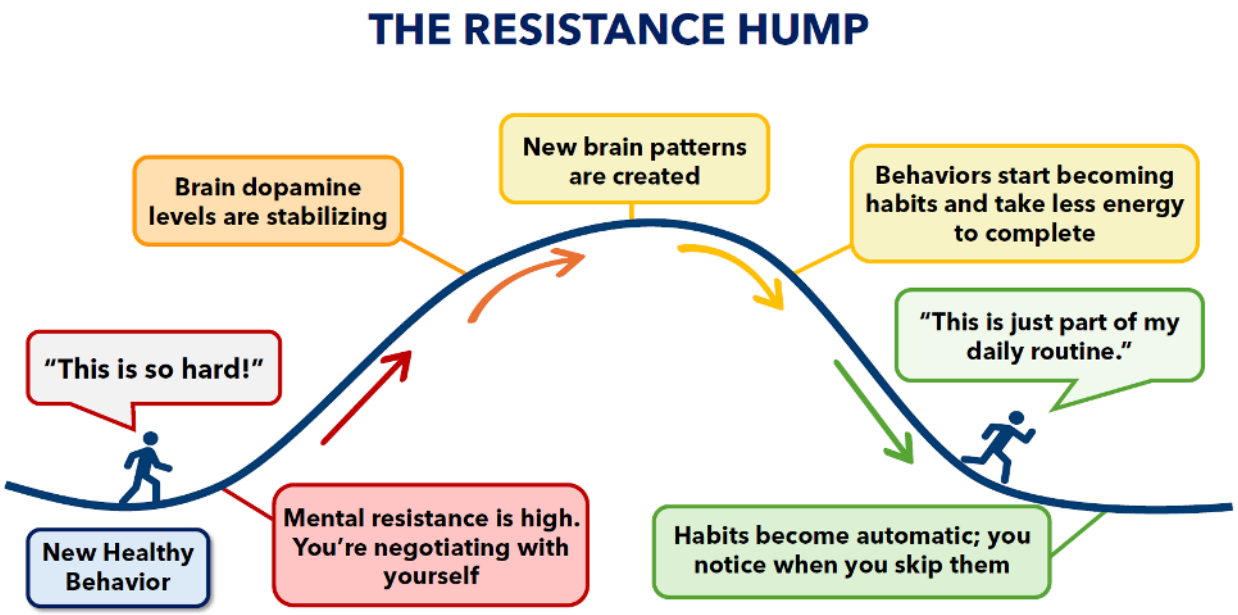
1. **Reminder –** Make it obvious
   - Give yourself a cue to remember
     - Put your shoes by the door
     - Set a phone reminder
     - Leave notes where you can see them
2. **Routine –** Make it easy
   - Start small so it doesn't feel overwhelming
   - Try just 10–15 minutes
   - Pick something simple you can stick with
3. **Reward –** Make it enjoyable
   - Make the habit something you look forward to
   - Walk with a friend
   - Listen to music or a podcast
   - Bring your dog along

Remember

Habits shape your daily life and your brain can learn and change. Those small actions that you take over time will lead to big results so, even if it feels hard at first, find a way to adjust or keep going. Every time you practice, you are building a stronger path toward lasting habit change.

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

When you try something new, it can feel uncomfortable. That's because new behaviors are unfamiliar, and unfamiliar things take more effort for your brain. It's very common to want to go back to old habits–even if you know they aren't helping you. Your brain likes what is easy and familiar.



Why Your Brain Resists Change

Your brain is used to doing things a certain way and it often runs on autopilot. Think about this: most people naturally cross one arm over the other. If you try to switch, it can feel strange or even "wrong"! That's because your brain is used to doing it one way. Changing habits works the same way: Old habits feel easy. New habits feel uncomfortable. Your brain wants to go back to what it knows.

The Resistance Hump

When you start a new habit, you may hit a point where it feels really hard. This is called the resistance hump. At the beginning, you might think: "This is so hard! I don't want to do this." This is normal. Your brain is working harder and adjusting to something new. If you keep going: Your brain will start building a new pathways. The habit gets easier. Eventually, will get easier and feel automatic over time.

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

Your Body Comes First

When you feel stressed or uncomfortable, your body may think you are in danger. This can put you into self-protection mode. When this happens: Clear thinking becomes harder. You may act on impulse. You might return to old habits. That's why you can't think your way through change until your body feels calm and safe.

Coping Skills

Your brain loves rewards. When something feels good, your brain releases a chemical called dopamine. Dopamine helps you feel good and tells your brain, "Do this again!" That's why it's important to find ways to make new habits enjoyable early on. To handle discomfort, you need skills to calm your body. These are called coping skills. Here are two helpful tools:

- **The 3 D's (Delay, Distract, Decide)**
  This tool helps you pause before acting automatically.
  Example: You want a snack right away
  - **Delay:** Set a timer for 15–20 minutes
  - **Distract:** Do something else while you wait
  - **Decide:** After the timer, choose what you really want. This helps you break the habit of reacting without thinking.
- **Urge Surfing**
  Urges and cravings come and go like waves. Instead of fighting the feeling, try this:
  - Notice the urge
  - Take slow breaths
  - Tell yourself: "I don't have to like this, but it will pass."
  - You can also say: "I will wait 15–20 minutes, then decide."

Most urges get weaker over time if you don't act on them right away.

Remember

Feeling uncomfortable is part of change. Wanting to go back to old habits is normal. You need to calm your body before making good decisions. Small steps and practice help new habits stick. Change isn't about being perfect. It's about learning how to get through the uncomfortable parts and keeping going.

POWER OF MINDSET

Your mindset is the way you think and talk to yourself. It is your inner voice. That helps shape how you feel, what you believe, and what you do every day.

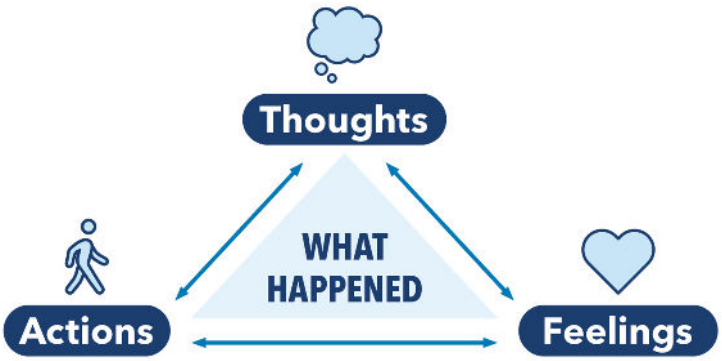
Why Mindset Matters

What you think affects how you act. If you tell yourself, "I can't do this," you might give up more easily. But if you think, "This is hard, but I can try," you are more likely to keep going.

Your brain pays extra attention to negative thoughts. You can think of it like this:

- Negative thoughts can stick like burrs
- Positive thoughts can slide away like water.

This is normal. Your brain is built this way to keep you safe. But it can make it harder to notice the good things and can also impact your actions and their results.



How Thoughts Affect Your Body

Stressful thoughts can lead to feeling worried, sad or upset, trouble focusing, or even pulling away from others. But here's the good news: when you change your mindset, your body can respond in a positive way. For example: If you see stress as a threat, your body tightens up. If you see stress as a challenge, your body stays more calm and ready. Your body can even release helpful hormones that support your heart and help you connect with others.

The Power of a Positive Shift

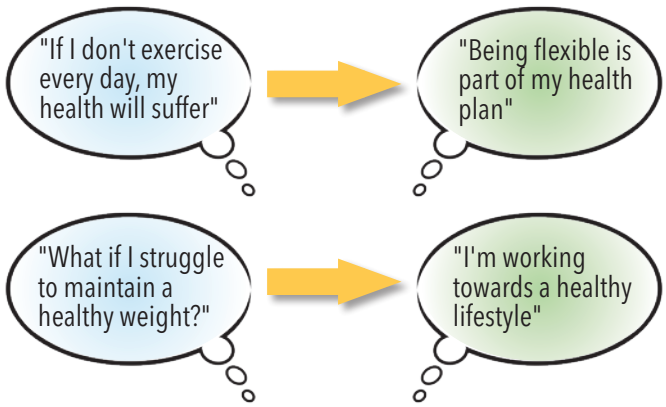
Sometimes, just believing something is helping you can actually make a real difference. This is called a "placebo effect." It shows that your thoughts can create real changes in your mood and behavior. A small mindset shift can:

- Help you feel more positive
- Improve how you handle emotions
- Support healthy habits

Thinking positive is not meant to be used as a way to avoid negative or unpleasant experiences. It's important to acknowledge them, while a positive mindset supports healthy navigation through those tougher moments

Try Reframing Your Thoughts

Reframing means changing the way you look at a situation. Remember, your thoughts are powerful, and you can learn to guide your thinking. Small mindset changes can lead to big behavior changes. When you train your mind to work with you instead of against you, it becomes easier to build healthy habits and keep going—even when things feel hard.



Not everyone experiences self-talk as words and conversations in their mind. Some people may experience self-talk more as feelings or sensations. How do you experience it?

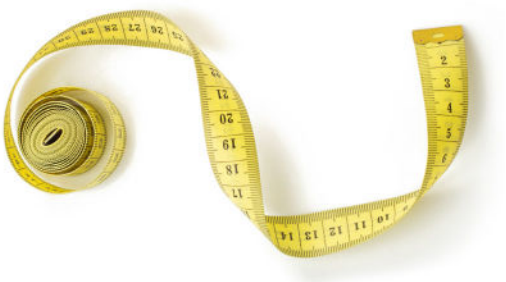
BUILDING A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SCALE

When you start making changes, it's easy to believe the number on the scale is the most important thing. But your weight is only one way to measure progress. That number can go up or down for many different reasons. Focusing too much on the scale may lead to feeling frustrated or wanting to give up, even when you're doing a great job.

Why Does the Scale Go Up?

There are many reasons why your weight might change on the scale:

- **You are holding onto water.** Increasing your workout routine, adding in strength training, or even having too much salt can cause your body to retain water.
- **Your muscles are storing energy.** If you're eating more carbs than before, your muscles store extra water, which can show as weight gain.
- **You are gaining muscle.** If you've started exercising more, you may be building muscle, which is good for your metabolism.
- **Normal daily changes.** Your weight can change based on how much water you drink, how much salt you eat, or even when you last went to the bathroom.



How to Respond Without Panicking

If the number on the scale goes up, don't rush to cut calories or skip meals. Doing that can slow down your metabolism and make it harder to stay on track. Instead, ask yourself:

- Have I been eating balanced meals? (Enough protein, carbs, and healthy fats?)
- Am I drinking enough water? (Dehydration can make your body hold onto extra water.)
- Have I been exercising more or less than usual?
- Am I getting enough sleep? (Lack of sleep can affect weight.)

Should I Weigh Myself Every Day?

Weighing yourself too often can be stressful. Your weight naturally changes from day to day, and that's normal! Instead of focusing only on the scale, try tracking:

- How your clothes fit
- Your energy levels
- How strong or active you feel

What If I Still Feel Worried?

Remember, weight is just one way to measure progress. The most important thing is to focus on healthy habits, not just a number. If you're feeling frustrated, talk to a doctor, dietitian, or your support group. You're not alone in this journey!

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AROUND FOOD

Food is more than just fuel because it's connected to our emotions, habits, and daily routines. After making big changes to the way you eat, you may notice old habits creeping back or face unexpected cravings and challenges. All of these experiences are completely normal! The key is to approach these moments with self-care, self-compassion, and consistency rather than guilt, panic, or frustration.

In this chapter, we'll explore why food challenges happen, how to identify triggers, and strategies to manage them in a healthy way. You'll also learn how mindful eating can help you feel more in control and how to create a self-care plan to support your long-term success.

A Reminder for This Journey

Changing the way you eat isn't just about willpower, it's about understanding yourself, building healthy habits, and practicing patience. If challenges arise.

Remember:

- You are not alone. Everyone faces food challenges and they are part of the process.
- Small steps add up. Even small changes in how you handle cravings and triggers can make a difference.
- Self-compassion leads to success. Treat yourself with kindness, not guilt, when challenges come up.

COMMON CHALLENGES

1. Emotional Eating

Many people turn to food when they feel stressed, bored, sad, anxious, or even happy. Food can bring comfort, but using it as a coping tool often leads to overeating and guilt.

Signs of emotional eating:

- Eating when you're not physically hungry
- Craving specific comfort foods (like sweets or salty snacks)
- Feeling guilty or regretful after eating

Alternative: Find non-food ways to cope with emotions, like taking a walk, journaling, talking to a friend, or practicing deep breathing exercises.

2. Cravings for Certain Foods

Cravings are normal, but they can feel overwhelming, especially for foods that are high in sugar, salt, or fat. These foods trigger dopamine (a feel-good brain chemical), making you want more.

Common causes of cravings:

- Restricting foods too much (which makes you want them more)
- Emotional triggers (stress, boredom, celebrations)
- Low blood sugar (not eating enough balanced meals)

Alternative: Instead of ignoring cravings, satisfy them in a mindful way. Pair a small portion of a craving food with a balanced meal, or find a healthier alternative that still feels satisfying.

3. Social & Family Pressures

Eating in social settings can be tricky, especially when family and friends have different eating habits. You might feel pressured to eat foods you're trying to avoid or eat more than you planned.

Common social pressures:

- Family members pushing you to eat more
- Friends encouraging you to indulge
- Feeling out of place when making different food choices

Alternative: Plan ahead by looking at menus, bringing your own dish to gatherings, or practicing polite ways to say "no, thank you." Avoid restricting eating prior to the events. Following your usual routine means you'll be less hungry when you arrive.

See the Eating as Self-Care section in the workbook Power of Self to review.

COMMON CHALLENGES

4. Mindless Eating

Eating while distracted—like watching TV, scrolling on your phone, or eating in a rush—can lead to overeating without realizing it.

Signs of mindless eating:

- Eating too fast and not feeling satisfied
- Snacking just because food is available
- Eating without paying attention to hunger cues

Alternative: Focus on your food, chew slowly, and check in with your hunger levels before, during, and after.

5. Returning to Old Habits

After making changes, it's common for old eating habits to creep back in, especially during stressful times.

Common habits that return:

- Skipping meals and then overeating later
- Eating out of habit, not hunger
- Falling back into all-or-nothing thinking ("I messed up, so I might as well eat whatever I want")

Alternative: Instead of feeling guilty, pause and reflect. Ask yourself: *What led to this? How can I make a different choice next time?* Remember, progress is not about perfection—it's about consistency.

Everyone faces food challenges, but being aware of them and having a plan can help you stay on track. Instead of focusing on what you can't have, shift your mindset to what makes you feel good and nourished. With self-compassion and consistency, you can build a healthy relationship with food that lasts.

FOOD TRIGGERS

Food choices are not just about hunger; many other factors influence when, what, and how much we eat. Recognizing your personal food triggers can help you make more mindful choices and develop strategies to manage cravings and emotional eating.

What Are Food Triggers?

A food trigger is anything that makes you want to eat, even when you're not physically hungry. Triggers can be emotional, environmental, or habitual, and they often lead to eating automatically without thinking about whether you're truly hungry.

Some triggers may be obvious (like seeing your favorite dessert), while others may be more subtle (like feeling stressed and suddenly craving snacks).

1. Emotional Triggers (Eating to Cope with Feelings)

Emotional eating happens when food is used to deal with emotions rather than physical hunger. This can happen when feeling stressed, bored, lonely, overwhelmed, or even happy and excited. Emotional triggers can lead to eating too much, choosing unhealthy foods, or feeling guilty afterward.

- **Stress Eating →** Craving salty or crunchy foods as a way to relieve tension (e.g., chips, fries).
- **Boredom Eating →** Eating just to pass time, without paying attention to hunger (e.g., mindlessly snacking while scrolling on your phone).
- **Comfort Eating →** Craving warm, carb-heavy foods like mac and cheese or ice cream when feeling sad or lonely.
- **Reward Eating →** Using food as a reward for getting through a tough day (e.g., "I deserve this treat because I worked hard").
- **Celebration Eating →** Associating food with happiness and automatically eating more at special events (e.g., birthdays, holidays).

How to Manage Emotional Triggers

- **Pause Before Eating –** Ask yourself: *Am I physically hungry, or am I eating because of how I feel?*
- **Find Non-Food Coping Strategies –** Instead of eating, try deep breathing, journaling, listening to music, or going for a walk.
- **Keep Trigger Foods Out of Sight –** If certain foods increase emotional eating,, avoid keeping them within easy reach.
- **Practice Mindful Eating –** If you do eat, slow down, enjoy each bite, and recognize when you feel satisfied instead of eating on autopilot.

"It's not about 'getting back on track.' It's about building a track you don't want to get off of."

– Unknown

FOOD TRIGGERS

2. Environmental Triggers (How Surroundings Influence Eating)

Your environment plays a huge role in what and when you eat. Food cues in your surroundings can lead to eating even when you're not hungry. These triggers often happen without thinking, making it easy to overeat.

- **Seeing food in plain sight** → Keeping snacks on the counter can lead to mindless grazing throughout the day.
- **Smelling food** → Walking past a bakery or fast-food restaurant can suddenly trigger cravings.
- **Eating while watching TV** → The distraction makes it easy to overeat because you're not paying attention to hunger.
- **Going to a restaurant** → Large portions, free bread, and social pressure can lead to eating more than planned.
- **Office break room snacks** → Seeing coworkers grab a cookie or donut may encourage you to do the same.

How to Manage Environmental Triggers

- **Make Healthy Foods Visible –** Keep fruits, vegetables, and nutritious snacks in easy-to-reach places instead of processed snacks.
- **Eat Without Distractions –** Avoid eating while watching TV or working so you can focus on hunger and fullness cues.
- **Plan for Social Situations –** Before going to a restaurant or event, decide what you will eat and set personal boundaries.
- **Change Your Environment –** If certain places or people trigger unhealthy eating, find ways to adjust your routine (e.g., bring a healthy snack to work instead of eating break room treats).

FOOD TRIGGERS

3. Habitual Triggers (Eating Out of Routine, Not Hunger)

Many people eat at specific times, places, or activities simply because it's a habit, not because they are actually hungry. Breaking these automatic eating patterns requires awareness and small changes.

- **Eating because it's "mealtime" →** You eat just because it's noon or 6 PM, not because your body is signaling that you're hungry.
- **Snacking at your desk or in the car →** Associating certain activities with food leads to automatic eating.
- **Late-night eating →** Watching TV or winding down before bed may make you crave snacks, even if you had a full dinner.
- **Finishing everything on your plate →** Eating past fullness because you were taught not to "waste food."
- **Weekend overeating →** Treating weekends as an excuse to eat differently than during the week.

How to Manage Habitual Triggers

- **Listen to Your Body –** Before eating, ask: *Am I actually hungry? How hungry am I on a scale from 1 to 10?*
- **Break the Association –** If you always eat while watching TV, try drinking tea or chewing gum instead.
- **Use a Smaller Plate –** If you tend to overeat out of habit, portion meals on a smaller plate so there is less room to fill your plate up.
- **Slow Down & Check In –** Halfway through your meal, pause and ask: *Am I still hungry, or am I just eating out of habit?*

THE HUNGER SCALE

Understanding the Hunger Scale: A Tool for Mindful Eating

Learning to recognize your body's hunger and fullness signals can help you eat more mindfully, prevent overeating, and maintain a healthier relationship with food.

The Hunger Scale (1 to 10) is a simple tool that helps you determine when to eat, when to stop eating, and when to check in with yourself before making food choices.

THE HUNGER SCALE

How to Use the Hunger Scale

- **Before Eating:** Ask yourself "Where am I on the hunger scale?" Aim to eat around a 3 or 4 (hungry but not starving).
- **While Eating:** Pause halfway through and check in. Are you at a 6 or 7? If so, consider stopping.
- **After Eating:** Notice how you feel. If you reached 8 or higher, reflect on whether you ate too fast or too much.

Why This Matters

- **Prevents Overeating –** Eating at a 3-4 instead of waiting until you're starving (1-2) helps prevent binge eating.
- **Encourages Mindful Eating –** Helps you listen to your body instead of external cues (like stress or cravings).
- **Supports Long-Term Success –** Eating until satisfied (6-7) instead of stuffed (9-10) makes it easier to maintain a balanced diet.

ACTIVITY 3.1: FOOD TRIGGER TRACKER

This tracker helps you identify patterns in your eating habits by recording when, what, and why you eat. By tracking your emotions, environment, and hunger levels, you can better understand your food triggers and develop strategies to manage them.

Each time you eat or have a craving, write down the details in the table below. After a few days, look for patterns—are there common emotions, situations, or habits that lead to eating when you're not truly hungry?

Food Trigger Tracker

Time	Feelings **before eating**	Hunger 1-10	Food Choices	Fullness 1-10	Feelings **after eating**

IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

What is Self-Care?

Self-care is the practice of taking intentional actions to care for your physical, emotional, and mental well-being. It's about prioritizing your needs so you can feel your best and make healthy choices in all areas of life, including food.

Self-care is not just about relaxing or treating yourself, it's about building habits that support your overall health, reduce stress, and help you stay balanced. When you take care of yourself, it's easier to stay consistent with your eating habits, manage cravings, and respond to challenges with self-compassion instead of frustration.

The Role of Self-Care in Managing Food Challenges

Self-care is an essential part of maintaining a healthy relationship with food. It helps you manage stress, regulate emotions, and stay consistent in your eating habits. When your basic physical and emotional needs are met, you are less likely to turn to food for comfort or stress relief.

Why Is Self-Care Important?

- **Prevents Burnout –** When you don't take care of yourself, stress and exhaustion build up, making it harder to make healthy choices.
- **Supports Emotional Well-Being –** Self-care helps you manage emotions in a healthy way, reducing emotional eating and cravings.
- **Improves Energy Levels –** Taking care of your body through sleep, movement, and good nutrition keeps you energized and prevents fatigue-related overeating.
- **Builds Self-Compassion –** When you treat yourself with kindness, you're more likely to bounce back from challenges instead of feeling guilt or shame.
- **Creates Sustainable Healthy Habits –** Self-care isn't about quick fixes, it's about daily actions that help you feel better in the long run.

TYPES OF SELF-CARE

1. Physical Self-Care: Supporting Your Body's Needs

Your physical well-being plays a huge role in hunger, cravings, and energy levels. When your body is well cared for, it's easier to make mindful food choices.

- **Get Enough Sleep –** Lack of sleep increases cravings, especially for sugary and high-carb foods. Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night to help regulate hunger hormones.
- **Stay Hydrated –** Dehydration can sometimes be mistaken for hunger. Keep a water bottle nearby and drink regularly.
- **Move Your Body –** Physical activity reduces stress, stabilizes blood sugar, and improves mood, making it easier to resist emotional eating. Find movement you enjoy, whether it's walking, yoga, or dancing.
- **Eat Balanced Meals –** Nourish your body with protein, healthy fats, and fiber-rich carbs to keep hunger in check and prevent energy crashes.

2. Emotional Self-Care: Managing Stress and Feelings Without Food

Many people turn to food for comfort, distraction, or stress relief. Developing non-food coping strategies helps break this cycle.

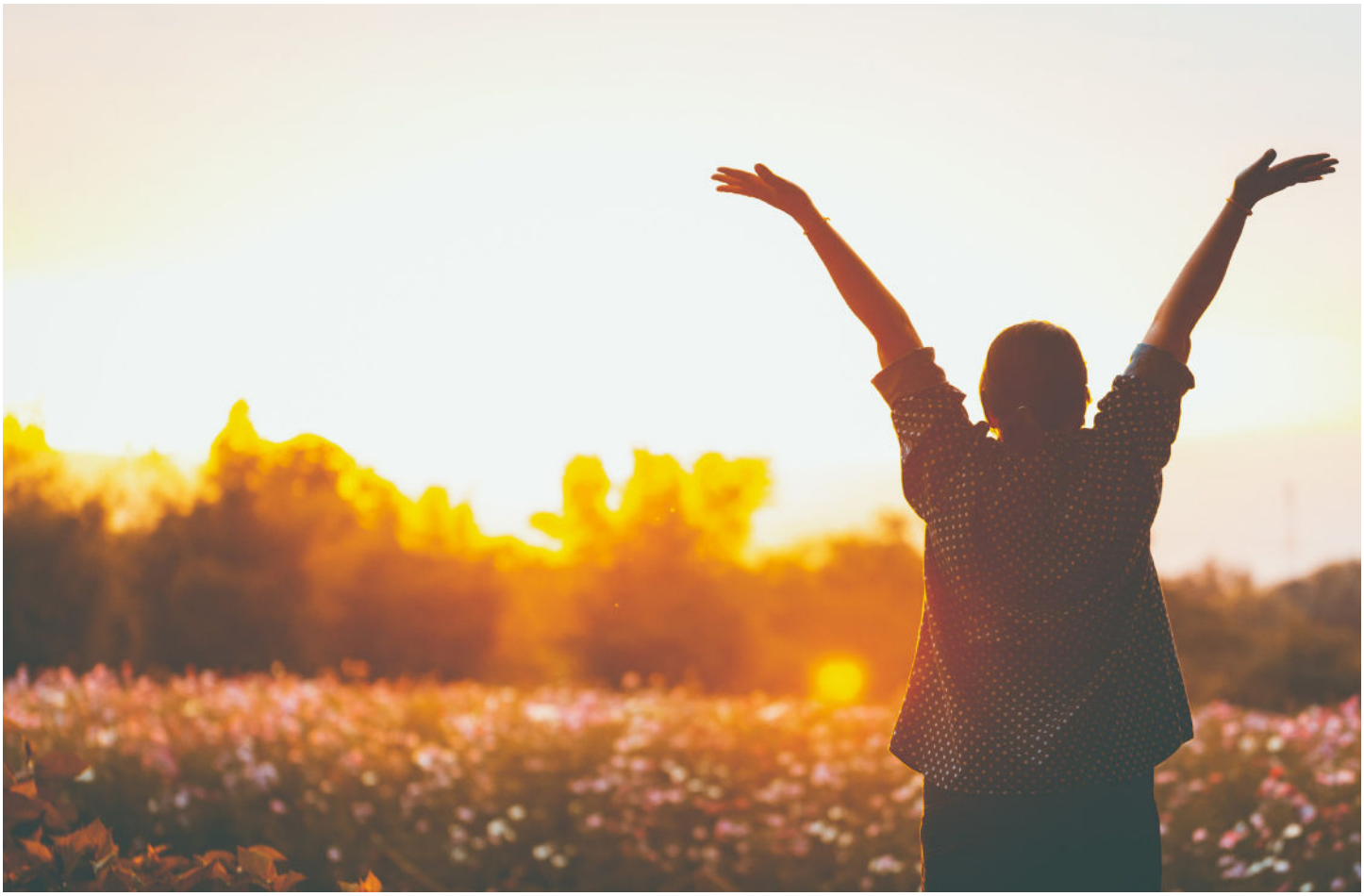
- **Check In With Your Emotions –** Before eating, pause and ask, "*Am I actually hungry, or am I feeling something else?*"
- **Practice Stress-Relief Techniques –** Deep breathing, meditation, journaling, or listening to music can help manage emotions without food.
- **Set Boundaries –** If stress from work, family, or relationships makes eating feel out of control, practice saying no to situations that drain you.
- **Engage in Joyful Activities –** Find non-food ways to comfort yourself, like reading, taking a bath, or calling a friend.

TYPES OF SELF-CARE

3. Mental Self-Care: Changing Your Mindset About Eating

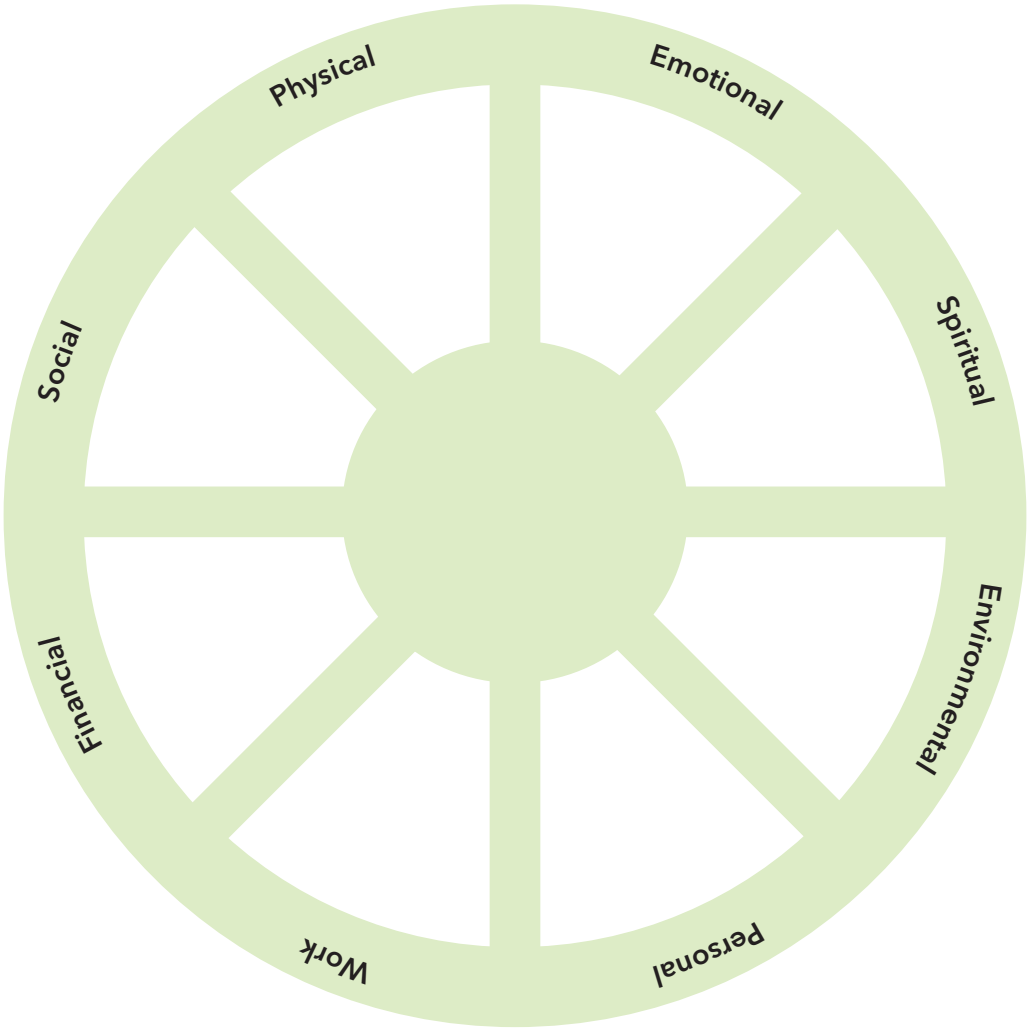
Your thoughts and mindset influence your eating habits more than you might realize. Negative self-talk, guilt, or an "all-or-nothing" mentality can make food challenges feel harder to manage.

- **Challenge Negative Thoughts –** Instead of saying, "I can't do anything right," try, "I am learning to make balanced choices."
- **Be Kind to Yourself –** Everyone faces setbacks. Self-compassion makes it easier to bounce back instead of spiraling into guilt and frustration.
- **Avoid Perfectionism –** You don't need to eat perfectly to be healthy. Focus on progress, not perfection.
- **Practice Gratitude –** Shifting your focus to what your body does for you rather than how it looks can help build a healthier mindset around food and self-care.



ACTIVITY 3.2: YOUR SELF-CARE PLAN

Let's revisit the Self-Care Plan from your Meal Replacement Program. Using the examples in the chart below as a guide, create a plan for meeting your needs and engaging in self-care across different areas of your life. Write your ideas in the open spaces.



Wellness Promoting Self-Care Examples

Physical • Sleep • Eating • Joyful movement • Medication • Mindfulness	**Social** • Time with friends • Family time • Boundaries • Communication • Volunteering	**Personal** • Setting goals • Values • Chores • Appearance • Hobbies	**Emotional** • Healthy coping • Self-compassion • De-stressing • Feeling emotions • Therapy
Spiritual • Prayer • Readings • Meditations • Time outside • Self-reflection	**Environmental** • Safe living space • Cleanliness • Organized space • Pleasing home	**Financial** • Paying bills • Budgeting • Savings • Treating yourself	**Work** • Boundaries • Breaks • Time management • Noticing burnout

SELF-COMPASSION & CONSISTENCY

The Power of Self-Compassion

Many people are their own worst critics when it comes to eating habits. If you've ever thought, *"I have no willpower,"* or *"I am a failure,"* you're not alone. But the truth is, being hard on yourself doesn't lead to better choices; it often leads to more stress, emotional eating, and an unhealthy relationship with food.

Self-compassion is the key to long-term success. It means treating yourself with the same kindness and understanding that you would offer to a friend or loved one who is struggling. Instead of using guilt and shame to force yourself to change, self-compassion helps you learn, adjust, and move forward in a healthy and sustainable way.

Self-compassion helps you pause and ask:

- What am I really feeling right now?
- Is there a way to comfort myself that doesn't involve food?
- What would I say to a friend or loved one who is in this situation?

Instead of thinking: *"I failed. I have no willpower."*

Try this: "One meal or one day doesn't define me. I can make a different choice next time."

Instead of thinking: *"I gave in to my craving, I've ruined everything."*

Try this: "Cravings are normal. I satisfied it and now I can move on."

Instead of thinking: *"I messed up, so I might as well keep eating."*

Try this: "I can pause, check in with my body, and stop when I feel satisfied."

Staying Consistent Over Time

Success isn't about being perfect, it's about being consistent. Life will always have stress, celebrations, and cravings, but the goal is to make small, sustainable choices that work for you.

Tips for Staying Consistent:

- Make small, manageable changes instead of having unrealistic expectations.
- Focus on progress, not perfection. Every positive choice adds up.
- Have a plan for setbacks—when you struggle, reflect on what happened and move forward without guilt.
- Find support; whether from friends, family, or a group, having accountability helps.

THE POWER OF AFFIRMATIONS

Affirmations are short, positive phrases that you say to yourself. They can be a simple and gentle way to care for your mental and emotional health.

When you've had a tough day, it's easy for your mind to focus on what went wrong. Maybe you ate differently than you planned, skipped a workout, or just felt discouraged. Affirmations remind you that one choice doesn't define your whole journey.

Affirmations aren't about pretending things are perfect. They're about helping you stay hopeful and kind to yourself, especially when you're struggling.

Here are some examples you might try:

- "I'm learning to take care of myself."
- "My worth is not measured by the number on the scale."
- "Small steps still count."
- "It's okay to need support."
- "I can make the next choice a different one."

ACTIVITY 3.3: BUILD YOUR SUPPORT LIST

Think about these questions and jot down your answers:

1. Who supports me when I'm feeling down or overwhelmed?
   (Example: My best friend, support group, a therapist, a podcast I love)

2. What can I say to myself when I feel discouraged?
   (Example: "It's okay to start over. I am not giving up.")

3. How can I ask for help when I need it?
   (Example: "Can we take a walk and talk? I need a reset.")

MAINTAINING MOTIVATION

When you first start something new—like a weight loss program or healthy eating plan—it's normal to feel excited and motivated. But over time, that feeling can fade. You might get busy, tired, or just feel stuck. That's okay. It happens to everyone.

The good news? You don't have to rely on willpower alone. You can build motivation, like a muscle, and keep moving forward, even on tough days.

What Is Motivation, Really?

Motivation is why you do something. It's your reason for trying—your "why."

Here are two types of motivation:

- **External motivation:** Wanting to look a certain way, fit into clothes, or please others.
- **Internal motivation:** Wanting to feel strong, have more energy, or take care of your health.

Both can be helpful, but internal motivation lasts longer. It comes from within you.

How to Keep Motivation Going

1. Remember Your "Why"

Think back to what brought you here. Why did you want to make a change? Write it down. Post it on your fridge or mirror.

2. Set Small, Realistic Goals

Big goals are great, but small steps help you get there. Instead of "I want to lose 50 more pounds," try:

- "I'll walk 3 times this week."
- "I'll cook dinner 2 nights this week."

3. Celebrate Progress

Progress isn't just about the scale. Did you say no to emotional eating? Try a new recipe? Move your body when you didn't want to? Celebrate it!

4. Talk to Yourself with Kindness

Motivation doesn't grow from guilt. Be gentle with yourself. Progress takes time. You're learning, not failing.

5. Stay Connected

Talk to others in the program, reach out for support, or attend classes. Having people around you makes it easier to stay on track.

Write a letter from your future self for the next time you feel unmotivated.

What do you want to remind yourself of?

REFLECTION

What do you think is your biggest challenge?

What have been your emotional reactions to changes in the number on the scale? What do you think you feel this way?

As you explore your reactions with changes on the scale, what are some non-scale victories (energy levels, clothing fit, strength, etc.) that you can focus on instead of just the number?

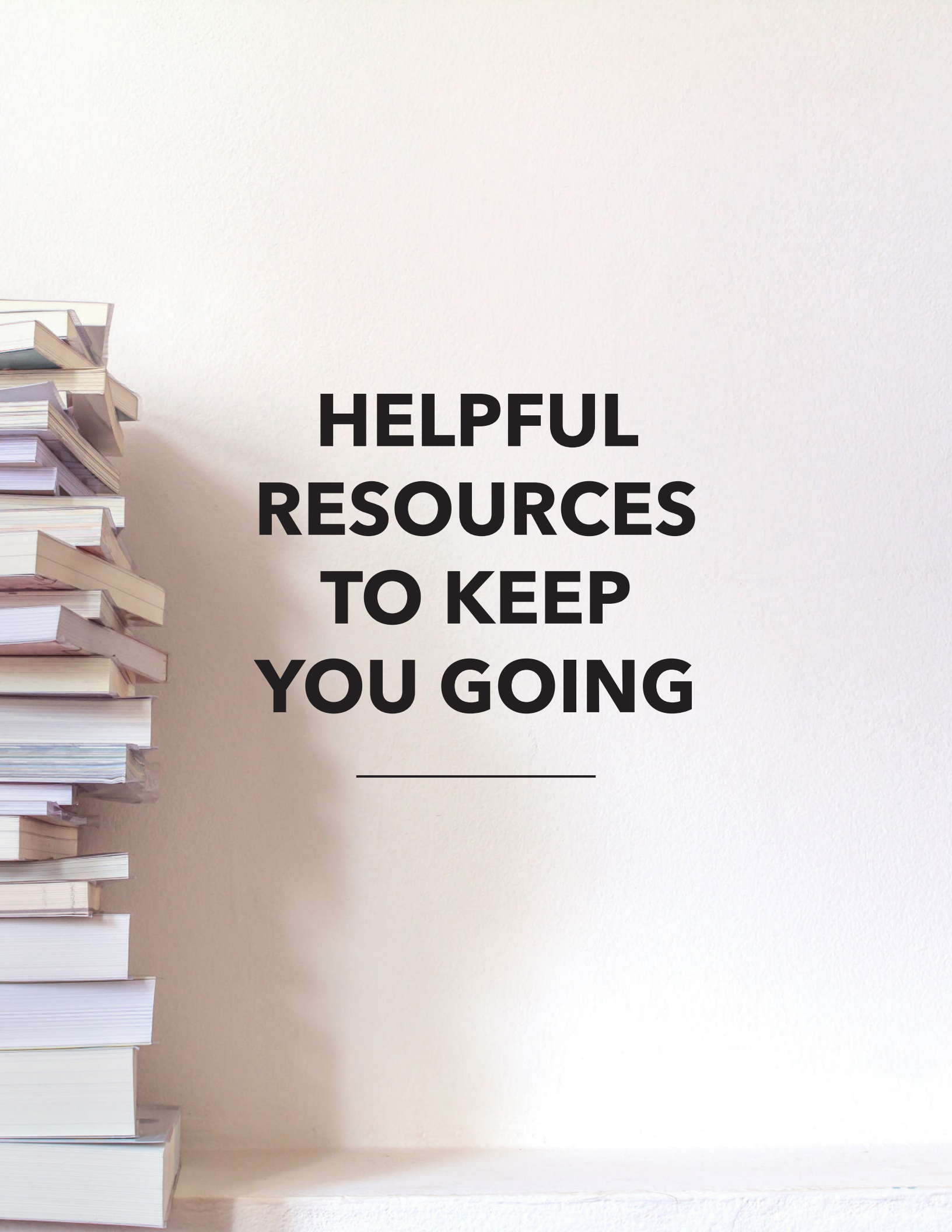
REFLECTION

How does eating at different hunger levels affect my energy and mood?

What self-care practices already work well for me?

What are three non-food ways you can take care of yourself when feeling stressed or emotional?

NOTES



HELPFUL RESOURCES TO KEEP YOU GOING

RESOURCES

Booster Seminar Program

After finishing the Meal Replacement Program, we encourage you to sign up for the Booster Seminar Program. This follow-up program offers continued guidance, tips, and motivation, both in-person and online. Staying connected can make all the difference as you transition back to everyday eating.

No fee to attend. Included as a part of your program fees.

To enroll in the Booster Seminar Program, scan the QR code on the right, or visit: positivechoice.org/enroll-boosters

For more information about the Booster Seminar Program, scan the QR code on the right, or visit: positivechoice.org/booster-info

Enroll in Booster Seminars

Booster Information

SECA Body Composition Testing

Learn about your body composition with this medical-grade body composition test. This scan helps you see changes in muscle, fat, metabolism, and can guide your next steps. **Available in San Diego only.**

To schedule your SECA Body Composition Test, call (858) 616-5514, scan the QR code on the right, or visit: positivechoice.org/seca

SECA Test

Nutrition & Fitness Support Group

Join our support group designed for people wanting additional nutrition support. It's a space to share challenges, ask questions, and get encouragement from others on the same journey.

To learn more about the Support Group, scan the QR code on the right, or visit: positivechoice.org/enroll-support

Support Group

Enroll in Healthy Balance

Continue your health and wellness goals by attending weekly sessions that include education on creating healthier habits through nutrition, fitness, stress management and mindfulness. This program can help you get started on a diet of whole, unprocessed, nutrient-dense foods, that aid in weight loss and disease prevention.

To learn more about Healthy Balance, scan the QR code on the right, or visit: positivechoice.org/healthybalance

Healthy Balance

ADDITIONAL
EATING LOGS

DAILY LOG: 2 MEAL REPLACEMENTS

LOWER NEEDS

Meal Replacements ☐☐

Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables ☐☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables ☐☐☐☐☐

Fruits ☐☐

Healthy Fats ☐☐

Healthy Protein ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

MODERATE NEEDS

Meal Replacements ☐☐

Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables ☐☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables ☐☐☐☐☐

Fruits ☐☐

Healthy Fats ☐☐☐

Healthy Protein ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

HIGHER NEEDS

Meal Replacements ☐☐

Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables ☐☐☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables ☐☐☐☐☐

Fruits ☐☐

Healthy Fats ☐☐☐☐

Healthy Protein ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

DAILY LOG: 1 MEAL REPLACEMENT

LOWER NEEDS

Meal Replacements ☐

Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables ☐ ☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Fruits ☐ ☐

Healthy Fats ☐ ☐

Healthy Protein ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MODERATE NEEDS

Meal Replacements ☐

Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables ☐ ☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Fruits ☐ ☐

Healthy Fats ☐ ☐ ☐

Healthy Protein ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

HIGHER NEEDS

Meal Replacements ☐

Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables ☐ ☐ ☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Fruits ☐ ☐

Healthy Fats ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Healthy Protein ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

DAILY LOG: NO MEAL REPLACEMENTS

LOWER NEEDS

Healthy Protein

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables

☐☐☐☐☐

Fruits

☐☐☐

Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables

☐☐

Healthy Fats

☐☐

MODERATE NEEDS

Healthy Protein

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables

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Fruits

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Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables

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Healthy Fats

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HIGHER NEEDS

Healthy Protein

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Nonstarchy Vegetables

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Fruits

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Whole Grains/Beans/Starchy Vegetables

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Healthy Fats

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POSITIVE CHOICE
INTEGRATIVE
WELLNESS CENTER

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