



GETTING THERE...

How healthy eating and active living helped one woman reach her goal

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Weight loss is always a hot topic. Forget the word diet. Start thinking about making a commitment to healthy living, which includes eating a variety of foods and participating every day in physical activities that you enjoy. Remember that a healthy body comes in many shapes and sizes and there are many factors that make it easy or difficult to maintain a healthy weight.

Patsy's story

Patsy is a 29-year-old switchboard operator in Edmonton, Alberta. Over the past 13 months, she has been on a journey toward a healthier lifestyle. As she shares her story, our Healthy Eating and Active Living experts provide practical tips for healthy living.

Early years

I started to gain weight in the later elementary years. I don't know what happened. I wasn't obese, but I became chunky. I had a couple of bad experiences in elementary school—people teasing me, but nothing too horrible. In junior high when I started to have my growth spurts, I lost a lot of the weight. I think I just stretched out. During high school, I was much the same size, pretty thin, and fairly active too.

After high school, I don't know whether it was just my activity that wavered, but I gradually seemed to gain weight. I couldn't even tell how much weight, but slowly, each year, I gained. All of a sudden, I was 22 and I was fairly big.

At 22, after a romance breakup, I did a whole lifestyle change. I went back to school and got back into going to the gym, and eating well. I lost quite a bit. And then again, I fell out of my workout routine, started dating Roger, and with our opposite schedules, it was hard. A lot of times, I would forego the gym to go out with him. Slowly over time, the weight kind of just crept back up on me.

Patsy now weighed about 104 Kg (230 pounds). She had reached a point where her weight was above a healthy [Body Mass Index \(BMI\)](#). Her weight gain had begun to affect her health. It had also affected her self-esteem.

TIP If you want to lose weight, begin with realistic goals. Life happens. If you fall out of your routine, don't worry. Get back into your routine as soon as you can.

Patsy's motivation

I just wasn't happy with myself. I would sit there and say, "I'm fat." I hated shopping, because nothing fit. I was going to the gym, 'cause I've always liked going to the gym, but I just wasn't seeing the results I wanted to see. I knew I had to do something, different. I wanted to change.



The wedding was an incentive for me. I wanted to look and feel the best I could. I had to do it for myself. I didn't even know if I would make my goal weight by my wedding, I was hoping I would, but I wasn't being unrealistic, I thought "If I'm not there, I'm not there." The wedding was a little extra push to help keep me going.

TIP If you want to lose weight, begin with realistic goals.

Finding a support group

I had tried doing it on my own. I was going to the gym faithfully, and gave it about a year. I just wasn't seeing the results. It didn't matter how much I went, month after month, it was the always the same thing.

I had heard good things about this support program. I could still eat normal, everyday food. It wasn't a diet, but a lifestyle change.

You learn how to pick better foods, and how to control portions. The program also encouraged exercise even if it was just a little bit. I thought well, it doesn't hurt to try it.

TIPS

- Find a quality weight loss support program.
- Be active, even if it's just a little bit.
- Think of something that you enjoy doing physically, such as walking, gardening, or playing a sport.

A personal goal

At first, I only told my family, and my boyfriend/fiancé. I didn't tell people at work. I wasn't embarrassed about it, I just thought I would try it before telling everyone in the whole world and then deciding that it wasn't for me.

It was also a personal thing. I thought, "I'm doing this for myself, so I don't need to tell everybody." As I went along, people began to notice.

A great support system

My immediate family and my boyfriend were really supportive. I would even hear Roger talking on the phone and he'd say, "I know her and she's going to do it. It may just be a matter of time, but she's committed." It was very nice to hear that he believed in me. He knew I would accomplish my goal.

With such a long process, it was nice when people still remembered to say, "Oh, you went to your meeting yesterday. How did it go?" If I was frustrated because I had gained a pound, they would say, "O.K., but how much weight have you lost altogether? Look how far you've come."

A long-term view

In the past, I wouldn't think in terms of a permanent change. It would be more like going on a diet to lose weight and eventually going off the diet. I would lose the weight, but gradually over the years, I'd go back up again. This time, I began thinking that I had to change, permanently. I started changing things without even realizing, and gradually one day I realized that it had become a habit. I had made the change.

Throughout the whole thing I was very committed. I wanted to do this for myself and it is a step-by-step process. The wedding is now coming up, and will pass, and I'm not going to say "O.K. my wedding is now over, diet's over, and I'm going to eat whatever I want to, and not exercise anymore." No, it's a lifelong commitment.

Environmental factors

- **Technology encourages us to move less.** Just think about it—the phone, the remote control, the elevator, the escalator, and the car, plus all the e-mails that you send to your colleagues instead of just walking over to see them. You tell yourself that you're saving time, but you are also less active.
- **The wide choice and availability of food causes us to eat more.** It seems as if companies launch new products on the market every week, while fast-food outlets open on every street corner. Marketing campaigns are very enticing, and the **portions are getting bigger.** Consider the large 500-mL soft drink and a large order of fries that you can get for just a few pennies more?
- When we are **stressed and in a hurry** (as we often are today), we often grab what is quick and available - which are often less nutritious, higher calorie snacks and fast food.

Social factors

An obsession with thinness

- Our society places a lot of value on beauty and thinness, which we can associate, (in spite of ourselves), with success, power and love. Societal values can be huge obstacles for women and men learning to accept ourselves for who we are and not what we look like.
- A desire to be thin can make us change our eating habits and become more physically active. Often, however, these changes are extreme and don't last very long.
- When we try short-term "fixes", we don't really make any changes that will last. We revert to old habits and can fall into the yo-yo diet trap (we lose and gain weight?).

TIP Get into the habit of adding physical activity into your day even if it's only for a short time (10-15 minutes). Every minute makes a difference.

Determination

Of course, everybody wants to see 5 pounds off the scale, or more, but I tried to be realistic. I was happy when I'd lost 2 pounds in the week.

I never really thought that I was going to fail. I was still going to the gym and just found I changed my eating habits. When you first start, you really are into it and you're eating more fruits and veggies I did a lot of reading on my own on the Internet and stuff about different foods. And you go to the grocery store, and start looking at the labels. To fill me up I need a good meal so I'd have some chicken and potatoes and my veggies.

The result

Patsy reached her goal weight in 9 months. Today, she is leading an active and healthy lifestyle.

There were lots of changes in me. Clothes kept getting bigger. I had to go out and buy new clothes.

People started noticing that I had lost weight, probably after I had lost about 20 pounds. A couple of people at work noticed that I changed my eating habits a little bit. When we had donuts in the office, I wouldn't have one. People would come up and ask me what I was doing that was different. They'd say, "Hey, good for you! Keep it up. Looking good!"

The biggest benefit to me is a better self-image. I feel better about myself. I still have days, like everybody, where I wake up and it doesn't matter what put on, "I feel fat."

I am still the same person, but I think I am more confident in myself. like myself better and I feel better for what I learned.

Patsy's plan for healthy eating

I do the grocery shopping. During the week when I'm working, have my breakfast, and bring my lunch to work so that I know what I am eating. have everything in my plastic container- chicken, rice and vegetables or a pork chop or a nice sandwich or salad. Everything is done the night before and ready.

Sometimes, I buy little treats, I personally enjoy the mini flavoured rice cakes, and popcorn. You have to make changes but you can still treat yourself. Once in a while I have a little piece of cake and ice cream. I don't cook separate meals for myself.

Factors involved in maintaining a healthy weight

Healthy eating and physical activity are two important factors to help you to maintain and/or lose weight. These factors are easier to change when you have the resources to do it like money, support and time. Other factors that can affect your weight loss experience are: your age, your sex, your genetics, your culture, where you live, what you do for living, and childcare and household responsibilities.



You have to remember it's not a diet, it's a lifestyle change so you learn how to adjust your lifestyle.

A lot of times, it's just about going out and reading the labels. I might have some sauces sometimes, but I rarely eat cream sauces anymore. I still have mayonnaise, but I get the low fat or calorie wise. And you don't need butter and all the extras on top. You can substitute. Instead of having the sour cream on your baked potato, you can have salsa, and there are a lot of different things you can experiment and try. I eat more vegetables and fruit. I'm more conscious about Get those five vegetables a day.

TIPS

- Satisfy your cravings.
- Balance your meals.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Overcome evening cravings for sweet or salty food.

How does weight gain affect health?

Your health, to a large extent, is determined by education, income, and risk factors, such as obesity. Weight gain can lead to obesity and is associated with high blood pressure, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.

Patsy's plan for active living

You don't have to join a support program, but you have to be active in whatever way you can. I know I have to keep up with the gym. I don't have to go five days a week, but even just three days a week, just to keep active.

I'm now into the routine, even at work on my lunch break, to walk around the block. It's a nice break, you get out of the office, you're outside and you can clear your mind and spend time by yourself. And I do that regularly. Unless it is 40 below, but even then I walk inside the hospital up and down the stairs and floor to floor.

Exercise is a release. I get to go there, it's my time. I do what I want. I put on my music, and my headphones and I go! And I like it.

TIPS

- Make exercise a priority, a worthy investment into your health.
- Plan physical activity into your day.

The future

I always said to myself and even said to my family, "I don't want to do that again! I don't want to gain the weight." I don't want to go back down that road again. Hopefully, with the help of the program as well as the knowledge that I have learned, I won't.

If I come back (from my honeymoon) and I've gained that little bit of weight, that's life!

I'll just get back into my routine- going to the gym, and eating well.

Weight loss challenges

The cost of healthy eating

Surprisingly, I find it is unfortunately more expensive to eat healthier. You have to put a little bit more into the budget for your groceries. You try and look to see what is on sale, but buying lots of fruits and vegetables, does cost more.

Going out to eat, you know it's a lot cheaper to go and buy that fast food combo than to go to another place and buy yourself a nice healthy meal. But over time you're used to spending a bit more and also know you're doing it for yourself and for your body.

Hitting a plateau?

There was a point, for about three weeks, when I didn't lose and I gained a little bit of weight. And that was very discouraging for me especially because I was going to the gym 5 days a week, I was watching everything I ate, I was being good, and it was just like "What's going on? Why am I gaining rather than losing?"

It's hard when you plateau. Luckily, I only had two plateaus. One was for two weeks and one was for three weeks. So actually, I was consistent about losing the weight very gradually.

Close to the end?

It's harder now, at the end. Part of it is because I haven't been able to get to the gym. I have been sort of running around and grabbing food here and there. But if I know I am going to be going somewhere after work and not able to eat, I pack myself another extra sandwich at home, and eat it in the car. I'm also making sure I go out on my lunch breaks and my walk after work. If I have half an hour I try and go for another walk.

Weekends

On weekends, you're out and about and running around. You have to grab things here and there. Even though you're trying to make healthier choices, a lot of times you don't know how it's prepared.

Getting to the gym was harder on the weekends. I'd always try and get there at least one day. And then special occasions, you're going out for dinner for someone's birthday, or Christmas. You treat yourself and have a little bit more.

Click on the following links to read more information.

TIPS

- ▶ [Life happens. If you fall out of your routine, don't worry. Get back into your routine as soon as you can.](#)
- ▶ [If you want to lose weight, set realistic goals.](#)
- ▶ [Find a quality weight loss support program.](#)
- ▶ [Be active, even if it's just a little bit!](#)
- ▶ [Try to think of something that you enjoy doing physically, such as walking, gardening, or playing a sport.](#)
- ▶ [Get into the habit of adding physical activity into your day even if it's only for a short time \(10-15 minutes\). Every minute makes a difference.](#)
- ▶ [Satisfy your cravings.](#)
- ▶ [Balance your meals.](#)
- ▶ [Eat more fruits and vegetables.](#)
- ▶ [Overcome evening cravings for sweet or salty food.](#)
- ▶ [Make exercise a priority- a worthy investment into your health!](#)
- ▶ [Plan physical activity into your day.](#)

TIP #1 Life happens. If you fall out of your routine, don't worry. Get back into your routine as soon as you can.

Research shows that close to 50 per cent of people drop out within six months of adopting an exercise program¹. People often have to make repeated attempts at exercise before they make it an ongoing, regular habit.

Here are some tips to keep exercising through thick and thin:

- Try to be active every day. Frequency is key to reaping health benefits. It also creates momentum for further physical activity.
- Select an enjoyable activity and focus on the sensations of feeling better and less tired.
- Consider a supervised program. Besides the social aspects, the structure of a program may help you to set aside some time for yourself in order to stay active.

TIP #2 If you want to lose weight, set realistic goals.

- Figure out why you want to lose weight and accept the fact that you may not be able to return to the same weight you were when you were younger.
- The more preoccupied you are about your weight loss, the more likely you are to be disappointed.
- Determine your Body Mass Index (BMI). There is a range of healthy weights for your height. Be realistic about your body weight.
- If your BMI is 25 or more and you have decided that you want to lose weight, set a realistic stage one goal. Start with approximately 10% of your body weight as an initial goal. (For example, if you weigh 175 pounds, your initial objective is a weight loss of 17 pounds.) Consult your doctor or dietitian for advice and support.
- Aim for a maximum weight loss of one or two pounds per week.
- Besides feeling better about your appearance, studies show that losing 10% of your body weight will reduce the risks of illnesses associated with excess weight including heart disease and diabetes.
- Your self worth should not be measured by your size, remember that healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes. Think about your abilities, your talents and your good qualities.

TIP #3 Find a quality weight loss support program.

Look for a program that encourages:

- A realistic goal weight and realistic weight loss of no more than two pounds per week.
- An eating plan based on Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide.
- A safe physical activity program that fits into your lifestyle.
- You to feel good about who you are and what you can offer.

More tips:

- Become aware of what is available in your area.
- Contact your local community centre and ask if they provide a weight loss support program.
- You can also form your own group! Ask a local dietitian to facilitate sessions, and give advice on eating and nutrition. To find a dietitian in your area, visit the Dietitians of Canada.

TIP #4**Be active, even if it's just a little bit!**

- Physical activity doesn't have to be very hard to improve your health. This goal can be reached by building physical activities into your daily routine.
- Just add it up in periods of at least 10 minutes each throughout the day. After three months of regular physical activity, you will notice a difference -people often say getting started is the hardest part!
- Scientists recommend 30-60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week² to stay healthy or improve your health.

TIP #5**Try to think of something that you enjoy doing physically, such as walking, gardening, or playing a sport.**

- What physical activity makes you feel best?
- According the Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute³, Canadians enjoy walking, gardening (yard work), home exercises, swimming and cycling best.

TIP #6 Get into the habit of adding physical activity into your day even if it's only for a short time (10-15 minutes). Every minute makes a difference.

Canada's [Physical Activity Guide](#) has lots of great ideas on how to stay active.

Here's how to stay active while you are at work:

- Take stretch breaks during meetings.
- Have a walking meeting - grab your colleague and discuss business while taking a walk.
- Take the stairs. Pretend the elevator is out of service.
- Post a notice near the entrance to the stairway suggesting people take the stairs and have them sign it when they do to encourage others to follow their lead.
- Replace your coffee break with a walking/wheeling break.
- Contract your stomach and back muscles while sitting in your chair or on the bus.
- Take a brisk walk before lunch for about 10 minutes.

TIP #7 Satisfy your cravings.

If you want that piece of cake, have that piece of cake, but have everything in moderation.

TIP #8 Balance your meals.

- Eat at least 3 meals a day. Some people prefer to eat smaller amounts more often. They may choose to have 4, 5 or 6 small meals per day.
- Aim to include a variety of food choices from all 4 food groups that make up Eating Well with [Canada's Food Guide](#).
- Don't skip meals.
- Expect the unexpected. Always have small, nutritious snacks on hand that keep easily (E.g. canned or dried fruit, milk puddings that don't need refrigeration, cold cereal or cereal bars, whole grain crackers, peanut butter, and juice boxes.)

TIP #9 Eat more fruits and vegetables.

Here are five easy ways to get into the habit of eating at least 5-10 servings of fruits and vegetables every day:

- For breakfast, have a glass of orange juice and/or put some banana slices on toast or in your cereal.
- At snack time, munch on an apple, nibble on some raisins or enjoy a pear...
- At noon, take raw veggies, (vary them each day) and add a low-fat dip or add tomatoes, lettuce, sprouts to your sandwich.
- At supper, fill your plate with fresh, frozen or canned vegetables.
- Finish your meal or evening snack with a fruit or a fruit salad, if you like.

There! That does the trick!

TIP #10 Overcome evening cravings for sweet or salty food.

Do you eat even when you aren't even hungry?

Are you in the habit of opening the refrigerator door just to see if there is something tempting?

Do you go into the kitchen whenever there is a commercial on TV?

Try these steps to overcome a sweet or salty craving:

- First of all, ask yourself why you want to eat:
 - Did you eat enough during the day?
 - Do you really want to eat something?
 - Are you just bored or feeling stressed?
 - Do you need to be comforted, talk to somebody or do an activity that will get your mind on something other than eating?
- If you aren't sure, drink a glass of water, leave the kitchen and think about something else. Wait about 15 minutes.
- After 15 minutes, if you still feel hungry, what would you like to eat? Something crunchy? Try an apple.
- Eat exactly what you crave in the kitchen, not in front of the TV.
- Avoid uncontrolled eating. Serve yourself a reasonable portion and don't take any more. If the temptation to take some more is just too strong put the package away.
- Don't feel guilty about snacking when you are hungry.

TIP #11 Make exercise a priority- a worthy investment into your health!

Consider adding activity - more time, more effort, more often. If you are already regularly active, you can still benefit by adding activity. Generally, the more active you are, the more benefits you will get.

Benefits of regular activity²:

- better health
- improved fitness
- better posture and balance
- better self-esteem
- weight control
- stronger muscles and bones
- feeling more energetic
- relaxation and reduced stress
- continued independent living in later life

Health risks of inactivity²:

- premature death
- heart disease
- obesity
- high blood pressure
- adult-onset diabetes
- osteoporosis
- stroke
- depression
- colon cancer

TIP #12 Plan physical activity into your day.

- Determine what you want. What do you want to enjoy or feel from physical activity?
- Set realistic goals. Start with easy to achieve goals.
- Focus on the doing. Focus on doing physical activity rather than your performance.
- Give yourself a time limit.
- Make it convenient. Activities that require less equipment, less money and less commuting may be most convenient.
- Make it regular, yet flexible. Select a few convenient times - during lunch, right after work - and do something at one of those times every day.

References

1. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (website). Promoting adherence to exercise. The Research File. 94-02. Accessed August 18, 2008.
2. Public Health Agency of Canada - Healthy Living Unit (website). Why Physical Activity is Important for You. Accessed August 18, 2008.
3. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (website). Popularity of physical recreation activities of adults, age 20+. Accessed August 18, 2008.

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