

# HEALTH & DIET



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## Follow These Rules, Reach Your Goal

by [Shaun Dreisbach](#)



**It's that simple. When it comes to hitting your best weight, these five steps are universally effective.**

**A**h, diets. There have been low-carb, no-carb, Master Cleanse, even the Alphabet Diet (the one where each day you eat only foods starting with A, then B...imagine Z day!). It's no surprise that decades of crazy plans have left us downright dumbfounded. "So many women I see are confused and frustrated," says Kathy McManus, R.D., director of nutrition at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. "But they aren't failing; it's those diets that failed *them*."

That's where *Glamour's* panel of top weight loss experts comes in. After looking at decades of research and helping hundreds of women, they've identified five simple rules that will help any woman get to her healthiest weight. Prepare yourself for success.

### *STEP 1: Don't overhaul your life —make small changes*

If you really want to lose weight for good, a gimmicky plan won't do it. "As soon as you say the words 'I'm going on a diet,' you've already failed, because that implies that at some point you're going to go off it," says James E. Painter, Ph.D., a food psychologist at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston who has conducted dozens of weight loss



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studies. “Diets don’t work.” Even if you had the Herculean willpower to stay on a dramatic plan forever, it wouldn’t be healthy—or fun.

Repeat these words, Painter suggests, until you truly believe them: *I want to get to a healthy weight and stay there forever. I don’t have to make huge changes all at once, just small ones consistently.* Such a simple mind trick won’t work for all women—some need to address other issues like emotional eating (see “[The Female Diet Trap](#),”)—but it can help many. “You’re basically saying out loud that you’re done with the quick-fix diet mentality and ready to commit to a newer, healthier way to live,” says Painter. “It’s a pledge.”

### *STEP 2: Learn how many calories you need*

Only 17 percent of women can accurately estimate how many calories their bodies need each day, according to a recent survey by the International Food Information Council. But figuring out this baseline (which depends on your height, weight and activity level) is crucial so you can determine how many calories you should be eating to reach your goal. Thankfully, your body’s requirements are easy to figure out. Go to our “[How Many Calories You Really Need](#)” fitness tool. Plug in your numbers, and it’ll tell you what you need to eat to maintain your weight as is. (For a 5’4”, 140-pound 30-year-old who rarely exercises, it’s 1,848 calories a day.)

### *STEP 3: Write down what you eat for at least a week*

Now take the time to tally how many calories you’re getting. (Websites like [nutritiondata.com](#) or [calorieking.com](#) have totals for just about every food on the planet.) “A food diary is a critical part of successful weight loss,” says McManus. “So many women try to keep a mental tally of what they eat, but it just doesn’t work.” A written log can be eye-opening—oops, I just ate 600 calories’ worth of mini-appetizer thingies!—and help you spot habits you need to address. Maybe you go nuts on weekends, or eat like a bird all day and then have an enormous dinner.

But most important, your log will tell you what to do to get to your goal. To lose a pound a week, you need to eliminate roughly 500 calories a day through exercise or food changes (you may need to trim more if your food diary shows you have been overeating). The healthiest way to cut back is to eat 250 fewer calories—about the amount you’ll save if you skip the mayo and cheese on a sandwich, or have a medium coffee with skim milk instead of a low-fat café mocha. Then burn off 250 more through exercise (roughly a 30-minute run, an hourlong dance class or a brisk 25-minute walk with your dog in the morning and after work). If you need to *gain* weight, eat an extra 250 to 500 calories a day from healthy foods like nuts, whole grains and dairy.

If you’re not sure what to eat, all our experts agree: Focus on fruits and veggies (they’re satisfying and low-cal), healthy carbs like whole-grain breads and cereals, low-fat dairy and lean meats or protein sources. Need a detailed food plan? Go to “[Exactly What to Eat to Lose Weight](#)” for our free 30-day meal program.

### *STEP 4: Be active for 60 to 90 minutes almost every day*

The book *Good Calories, Bad Calories* by science writer Gary Taubes recently made headlines by arguing that exercise won’t help you lose weight. It’s true that cutting calories from your diet may be easier and may lead you to drop pounds faster than exercise alone, but the weight loss benefits of exercise should not be discounted. James O. Hill, Ph.D., a cofounder of the National Weight Control Registry—a study that tracks the habits of people who have lost more than 30 pounds and kept them off for at least one year—is vehement:

“There are thousands of studies showing a relationship between exercise and weight loss,” he says. “Honestly, questioning whether exercise helps you lose weight is like questioning the fact that the world is round.” All of our other experts agreed: Not only does working out burn calories but it also increases lean muscle mass, which lifts metabolism, the rate at which your body burns calories all day. (Besides, exercise is just plain good for you. Even Taubes didn’t dispute that.)

Yes, 60 to 90 minutes sounds like a lot—but it needn’t all be gym time. “A great deal of that—and on some days, maybe even all of it—can come from things like taking the stairs every chance you get or doing more errands on foot,” says Hill. “All that exercise, while not the kind that requires a sports bra, definitely counts.” If you can’t fit in a whole hour, do as much as you can—every bit makes a difference.

### *STEP 5: Eat sensible portions*

Most of us don’t—we eat whatever’s on our plate. In one study Painter conducted, people who unknowingly ate soup out of self-refilling bowls consumed 73 percent more than those who were given regular bowls. “They just wanted to get to the bottom,” he says. But the normal-bowl eaters felt just as satisfied after their smaller portions: proof that a lot of hunger and satisfaction is in our heads. “Even though they ate much less, in their minds it was like, Hey, I had a whole bowl—I’m done!” says Painter. That’s why for weight loss he recommends using small plates, bowls, glasses and even utensils whenever possible (check out our plate comparison, right, to see how these sizes have ballooned). “The other day I met someone who had lost 50 pounds in six months in part by making these changes,” he says. “That’s how big an impact it can have on your calorie intake.”

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