

MANAGING WEIGHT FOR DISEASE PREVENTION

Contributed by Heidi Roth, RDN, CHHC

One of the most powerful ways to maintain your health is to prevent chronic disease, and weight management plays a crucial role in this effort. I've been a dietitian for more than 30 years (yikes!) and have seen countless weight management trends come and go (I'm looking at you "healthy" SnackWells!). In that time, there have been a lot of changes in the way we look at weight. Obesity is now recognized as a complex, multifactorial disease, and simple advice like "eat less and move more" isn't always effective.

We also know that health is much more than just a number on the scale. While carrying excess weight (BMI > 25) is linked with a significantly higher risk of many conditions, such as heart disease, certain cancers, diabetes, and depression, it does not mean every person with a higher BMI is automatically unhealthy. Likewise, being in the "normal" range doesn't guarantee good health. In fact, a significant portion of adults with a BMI <25 fall into the category of "skinny fat." These individuals are a normal weight but with high percentages of body fat and low muscle mass, putting them at risk of metabolic conditions like diabetes and heart disease as well.

Best Practice Tips for Weight Management & Disease Prevention

1. **Focus on quality.** While the total amount of calories still counts, there is a growing appreciation that not all calories are created equal. 100 calories from broccoli will have a very different effect on hunger hormones and metabolism than 100 calories from a soda. Whole, nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, beans, nuts, and whole grains are naturally more filling, support stable blood sugar, and help reduce overeating.
2. **Track what you eat for at least a week.** Even the healthiest eaters have blind spots. Sustainable weight loss still requires a small calorie deficit (not extreme restriction, which often leads to rebound eating.) Using a tracking tool like MyFitnessPal (or something similar) can provide valuable insight into your current intake and show you how it compares to your goals.
3. **Prioritize protein at every meal.** Protein helps you feel full, helps maintain muscle, and can stabilize blood sugar levels, preventing spikes and crashes. A simple way to increase protein is to rethink breakfast. Instead of starting the day with something sweet, try a savory option like scrambled eggs or tofu, cottage cheese, or leftovers from dinner the night before.
4. **Fiber is essential!** Like protein, fiber keeps you full and balances blood sugar levels. It also nourishes your gut microbiome, and emerging evidence shows certain gut bacteria may even help produce GLP-1, the hormone that supports satiety and weight loss! Most people only consume about half of the daily recommended amount of fiber. An easy way to eat more fiber? Fill one half of your plate with vegetables and choose intact whole grains like barley and quinoa instead of refined flour-based foods.
5. **Pay attention to WHEN you eat.** Do you eat from the moment you get up to right before bed? That adds up to a lot of eating hours! Shortening your eating window can help you naturally eat less, and avoiding late-night snacking can have a big impact on your metabolism as well as sleep. A practical way to do it is to finish eating at least three hours before bed and aim for at least a 12-hour overnight fast. (Discuss with your doctor if you are on medication or diabetic.)
6. **Prioritize sleep.** Did you know poor sleep can interfere with hunger hormones and increase cravings for high-calorie foods? Adults generally need 7-8 hours per night. Aim for a consistent bedtime, limit screens before bed, and create a wind-down routine that helps you relax. Think of sleep as part of your nutrition and exercise plan- it's that important.





- 7. Build some muscle.** Muscle is your body's secret ally. It burns more calories at rest than fat, and keeps you strong physically (and mentally!) When it comes to weight loss, the goal is to lose fat, not muscle, and exercise helps preserve lean mass along the way. The best workout is one that you enjoy and stick with - because consistency matters more than perfection.

At the end of the day, disease prevention and weight management aren't about quick fixes or perfection— they're about building sustainable habits that support your overall health and well-being. By focusing on quality nutrition, movement, sleep, and mindful routines, you can lower your risk for chronic disease while also improving energy, mood, and resilience. Remember, lasting change happens one step at a time, so start with one or two strategies that feel realistic for you, and build from there. Your future self will thank you!

RECIPE CORNER: SOUTHWEST WHITE BEAN CHILI

Here's a tasty recipe that is high in protein and fiber to keep you satiated, perfect for those cozy fall nights!

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 green pepper, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 lb ground turkey (or 8 oz block of tempeh, crumbled)
- 2 cans (15 oz each) white beans (cannellini or Great Northern), drained and rinsed
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 small can (4 oz) diced green chiles (mild or hot, to taste)
- 1½ tsp ground cumin
- 1½ tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp chili powder
- ¾ tsp salt
- 1 TB soy sauce.
- Juice of ½ lime
- Garnishes: fresh cilantro, diced avocado, Greek yogurt/sour cream, hot sauce, shredded cheese

PREPARATION:

1. Heat olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion and green pepper and sauté 4–5 minutes until softened.
2. Add garlic and ground turkey or tempeh. Cook, breaking it up, until turkey is no longer pink, about 5 minutes.
3. Stir in cumin, oregano, chili powder, and salt. Cook 1 minute to bloom the spices.
4. Puree 1 can of beans in the blender with 1 cup of broth. Add to the pot with the remaining beans, chicken broth, and green chiles.
5. Bring to a simmer, then reduce heat to low and cook 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.
6. Stir in lime juice and adjust seasoning and salt before serving. Serve with assorted garnishes.

What lifestyle changes will you make for weight management and disease prevention?



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