

A guide to MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH GOALS even when things get tough



Does our ability to achieve our health goals change?

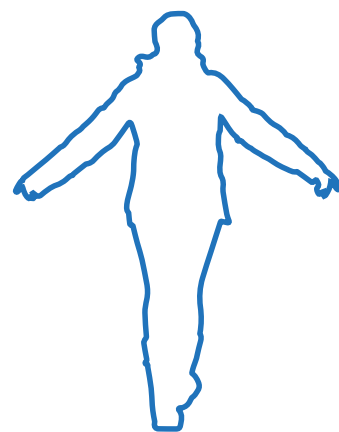
It is very common for our ability to achieve our health goals to vary. No one will feel 100% focused all of the time, every day. Challenges to achieving health goals will happen even when you are trying to achieve something that you feel very committed to. A challenge can occur for a number of reasons.

The most common times are when:

- You have found it challenging to lose weight despite making healthier lifestyle changes
- You have been trying to lose weight but then become disheartened with the process
- You have found it hard to maintain your health goal focus because of new life changes or stresses

The challenge of managing weight

Managing your weight in the long-term can be challenging. You not only need to change your eating, drinking and activity habits but also your relationship with food and to maintain these changes over time. This means any changes that you have made will have to fit in with your lifestyle in order to keep them going.



You know what you will be able to keep up better than anyone else will. This is why healthcare professionals encourage you not to make drastic decisions but instead, focus on sustainable changes that you can maintain in the long term.

One of the biggest challenges that you will face on your weight management journey is keeping health goal focused. It is easy to stop thinking about something without even noticing that you have stopped. This can happen very easily with weight loss plans — for example, a person can let their healthier eating habits slip and then suddenly become aware that they have started to put on weight. Or someone may slowly start to reduce their physical activity levels and may not notice that they are slowly regaining the weight they lost. As you go through your weight management journey, you will need to adjust your eating and physical activity in line with your progress in order to maintain your weight loss.

In this guide we offer some strategies that might help to keep you health goal focused

Firstly, it is important that you identify early signs of a drop in health goal focus. Like most things, it is easier if you can address any causes as early as possible. What are the first signs that you notice when your health goal focus is dipping?

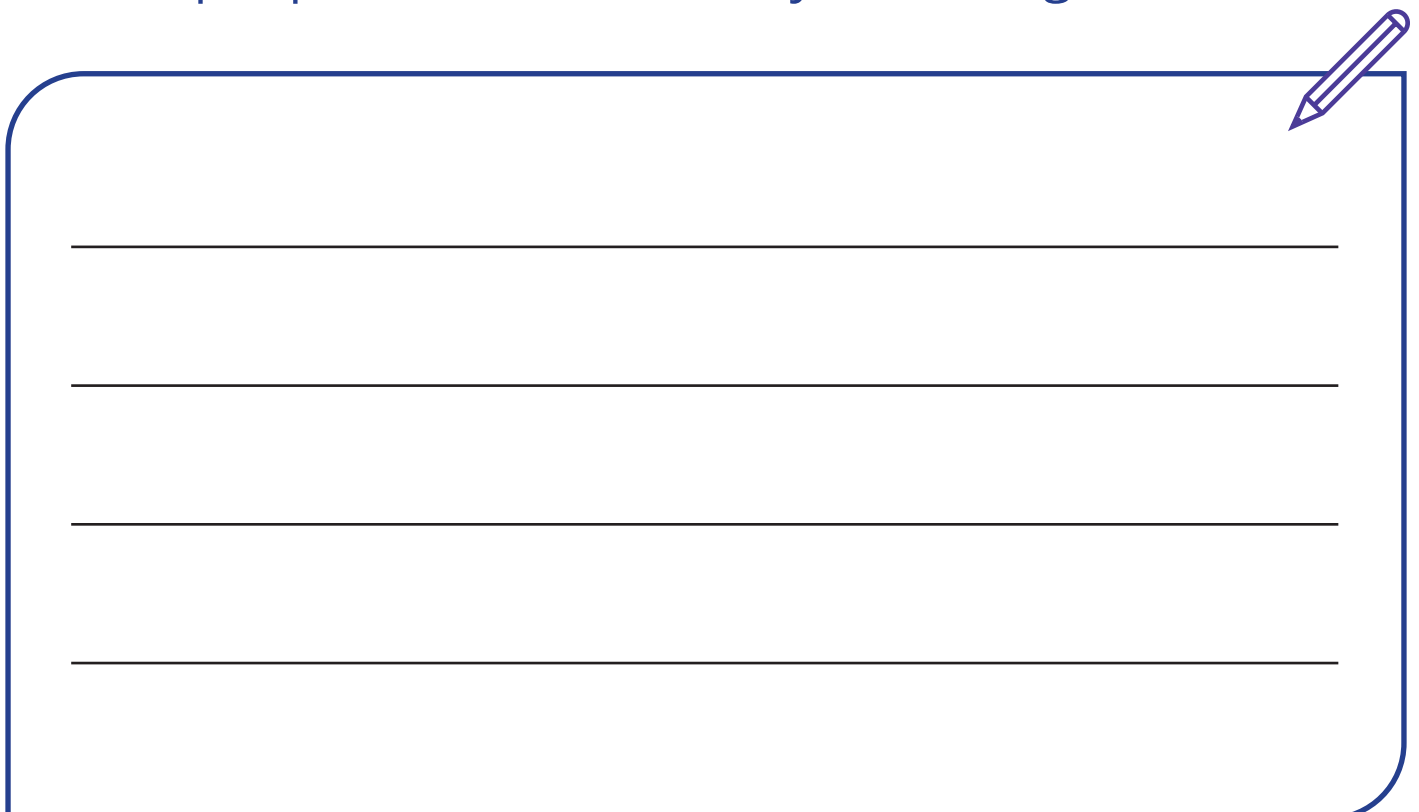
What might have changed?

What might you be doing differently?

How might you be feeling?

Are there specific situations or times when you slip back into old habits?

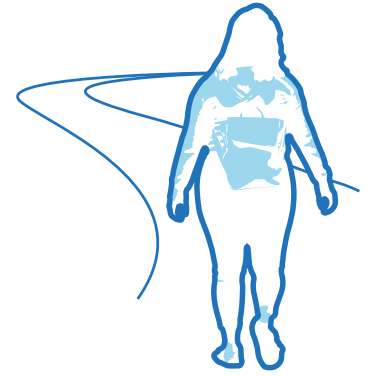
Are you more likely to go “off-track” when you are with certain people i.e. friends, family or colleagues?



A large rounded rectangular box with a blue border and a pencil icon in the top right corner, containing four horizontal lines for writing.

Example

Julia has recently been experiencing a very busy period at work. A couple of her colleagues are unwell and her workload has increased. She is finishing work late most evenings and is really tired when she gets home. As a result, she has been buying more ready meals to have in the evenings. Also, as she's getting home late, she has not been going out for a walk in the evenings, something she really enjoyed previously.



Next, consider your options

- Pause and reflect on what has gone well and what you have found difficult
- Think if pausing from trying to lose more weight would help. Refocus on maintaining your current weight for the moment
- Are there any other health goals you can focus on to help the situation while you maintain your weight? For example: asking for help and problem solving your work challenges, being kinder to yourself and accepting the situation if you cannot change it immediately, adapting how you unwind after work
- Think about what may have affected your health goal focus so that you can get back on track

What can you do to manage your health focus levels?

1. Plan for life events.

Life does not stand still. In the future you may change jobs, you may not have as much free time as you previously did or you may experience other life events that affect your eating and drinking habits and physical activity levels. As much as it is possible to do, it may be useful to have a plan that considers any upcoming changes that you think may impact on your new habits.

How will you manage these? When and who should you contact if you need any additional support?

2. Make the most of when things are going well.

Congratulate yourself when things are going well but also use this time to think about the future and any challenging situations that may arise so that you can develop an action plan.

3. Don't panic, setbacks are very normal.

It is very common to have setbacks when you are changing long-standing habits. The key is to not give up completely when you have a setback. Instead, be kind to yourself like you would a friend and try to re-focus on your goals and start to put back in place those things that you were doing to help you lose weight.

4. Make some time to reflect on your progress.

Make a diary date with yourself! Perhaps do this once a week or once a month — whichever works best for you.

How are you feeling? What do you feel proud of? What obstacles get in the way of you sticking to your eating and activity plan? How might you manage those?

Keep a diary if it helps or there are some really good apps available to help you monitor your progress.

5. Remind yourself of the benefits of making changes.

Spend some time reflecting on the reasons why you decided to make the changes in the first place.

Are these reasons still important to you? What benefits have you achieved on your current weight loss journey?

6. Surround yourself with positive reminders.

Keep your walking shoes with you and exercise clothes packed and ready to go. Make healthier foods the easier choice by having them more visibly available and the less healthier foods out of sight. Make sure that the places you spend most of your time are full of positive messages, inspiring quotes, and other visual reminders of your vision and goals.

7. Get the right support.

Friends and family can offer invaluable support — let them know how they can best help you. Community based or online weight management groups can offer the support some people may need to maintain their levels of health goal focus.

8. Give your motivation a boost.

Set yourself some new goals to re-focus and challenge yourself.

How about trying a new physical activity?

Whatever new goal you create, be sure to set up a non-food related reward for yourself — ‘when I achieve this, I am going to get this for myself or I am going to do this’.

Find success stories about people who have managed to become a healthier weight by making long term lifestyle changes that inspire you and read them often. These stories can be found in magazines and on the internet.

Additional support

Even if after reading and using this guide you are still finding it difficult to keep focused, do seek the advice and support of a registered dietitian or other members of your healthcare team.



Jeremy Gauntlett-Gilbert, Clinical Psychologist and Dr Claire Grace, specialist dietitian, in their book **'Overcoming Weight Problems'** offer a number of tips on keeping motivated.

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