



# dropping pounds FOR GOOD!

BY **Hope S. Warshaw, R.D., CDE**

PHOTOS BY **Blaine Moats**

**L**osing unwanted weight—from counting calories to moving muscles—is one tough battle. Should you relax once you hit your mark on the scale? Not exactly. The work it takes to keep pounds off is often shortchanged by the focus on trimming down in the first place.

“Maintenance is even harder than losing weight,” says Molly Gee, M.Ed., R.D., a behavioral interventionist with the National Institutes of Health’s Action for Health in Diabetes (Look AHEAD) study at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Gee and other leading weight control experts say, however, there are proven strategies for success.

## **Why pounds return**

Research shows that packing on extra pounds can set off a chain of events that leads to insulin resistance, prediabetes, and type 2 diabetes. These metabolic changes can’t totally be reversed by weight loss because the body’s preservation instinct kicks in and holds on to the extra pounds.

“The biologic systems that regulate weight are complex, and we’ve still got a lot to learn,” says Karen Miller-Kovach, MS, MBA, R.D., chief scientific officer with Weight Watchers International. On a positive note, she says, people who successfully lose and keep off weight report that staying slim takes less effort over time.

## **Weight maintenance is possible**

Miller-Kovach dispels the notion that weight cycling (yo-yo dieting) wrecks a person’s metabolism.



It's not a good idea, however, from a psychological perspective. Repeated weight loss-and-gain cycles can undermine your self-efficacy—the belief that you can control your weight. Strong self-efficacy promotes weight loss.

And what about the idea that it's harder for people with type 2 diabetes and/or insulin resistance to lose and keep off weight? Though this observation is made by clinicians, the Look AHEAD study in people with type 2 diabetes (for 6 years, on average) shows that with intensive lifestyle changes (consuming fewer calories and fat grams, engaging in 175 minutes of physical activity each week), people with diabetes can take and keep off medically significant amounts of weight, Miller-Kovach says.

### Food and physical activity

The National Weight Control Registry (NWCR), online at [nwcr.ws](http://nwcr.ws), was initiated 15 years ago by two leading obesity researchers, Rena Wing, Ph.D., and James Hill, Ph.D. They have tracked information from more than 5,000 people who have lost at least 30 pounds and kept it off for one year or longer. On the food front, their conclusions are watch your calories, trim fat grams, and eat breakfast daily. When it comes to activity, do it regularly and a lot of it—60–90 minutes a day—and minimize sedentary activities such as watching TV.

### Best behaviors

Weight maintenance takes a concerted effort and the development of some new skills.

“Learning and honing the behaviors associated with long-term weight loss will help you eat and exercise healthfully for the rest of your life,” Miller-Kovach says.

Such behaviors include stress management, coping skills, flexible restraint (practicing self-control around food), goal setting, and self-monitoring (keeping food and activity journals). Other key behaviors include getting on the scale regularly and having a relapse-prevention plan to put in place pronto should the pounds creep up.

### Planning for success

Gee acknowledges that when it comes to weight maintenance, life often gets in the way. “The recipe for success also requires tenacity and flexibility to deal with the ups and downs of life,” she says.

Here are some of Gee's tips:

- **Identify your motivators.** Know why keeping the weight off is important to you—and more important than a bite of this or a taste of that.
- **Simplify your eating plan** and minimize your repertoire of food choices. Set your plan in motion and follow it.
- **Seek and find support.** Participate in a weight control group, work one-on-one with a counselor, or pair up with a buddy. 🧑‍🤝‍🧑



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## Less is more

Karl Reed, PWD type 2, has kept 50 pounds off for over a decade. At age 67, he's the longest-surviving man in his family—the rest died of heart disease.

Karl was diagnosed with diabetes when his weight reached 270 pounds. The lightbulb went off: “I knew if I was going to get to watch my grandchildren grow up,” Karl says, “I'd better take action—and fast.”

Karl enrolled in a weight control program in Springfield, Illinois, run by Anne Daly, R.D., CDE, whom Karl fondly calls his drill sergeant. Karl still attends Daly's maintenance support group. “No exceptions, no excuses,” he says. Today Karl takes medications to control his blood pressure and blood lipids, but none for his blood glucose. Here are his keys to success:

- Walk 3–4 miles a day; record it.
- Eat up to 8 cups of fruits and vegetables a day.
- Don't keep tempting “danger” foods in the house.
- Make use of a food journal.
- Dine in restaurants only rarely.
- Don't arrive famished to food-focused events.
- Attend the weight maintenance group weekly.

**Karl's advice:** If you veer off track, get back on your plan quickly. “When my resolve is weakened, I recall just how good I feel and why I want to enjoy more years.”