

Eat Smart, Move More...
Maintain, don't gain!

HOLIDAY Challenge

WEEK 1

Holiday Challenge Guidelines

The overall goal is for participants to *maintain* their current weight for the last 7 weeks of the year. As a participant, you will:

- **Weigh yourself each week.** Tracking weight is a proven weight management strategy. It is important to know your starting weight as it will keep you motivated and allow you to track your progress.
- **Track what you eat and drink.** By tracking what you consume each day, you can make sure that you are eating within calorie goals to maintain your weight.
- **Track your activity.** Stay motivated by tracking activity each day. Every little bit adds up and seeing how much you have done can encourage you to do more.
- **Make a plan.** Figure out what works best for you. Use the tips and strategies provided to help you navigate the season.

Welcome to the Holiday Challenge

We are excited to have you participate in the Holiday Challenge. For the next seven weeks, you will embark on a journey to maintain the same weight from now through New Year's Day. Share with friends and family as we work together to eat smart, move more, and savor the holiday season!

WEEK #1 CHALLENGE:

Write It When You Bite It and Jot It When You Trot It!

Study after study indicates that **tracking** what we eat and how we move using an app or pen and paper is strongly linked to helping us achieve and maintain a healthy weight. This is why tracking your weekly weight, food, and physical activity are the Holiday Challenge "Rules of the Game." Tracking is a critical piece to success, and we want to reinforce the importance of this activity by challenging you to start tracking this week—*better yet today!*



You can keep it simple, aim for at least three entries each day (ex. in the morning, afternoon, and at night), and do it consistently day after day for the best results. Tracking takes less than 15 minutes each day, and this information will help you make a plan tailored to your needs while you navigate this holiday season. You don't have to track forever. Tracking occasionally can still help you be more mindful about what you eat and how you move to improve your habits. For example, you may not realize how many calories are in the foods and drinks you regularly consume, or that daily physical activity is much higher or lower than you realized.

If you are new to tracking, check the **nutrition facts label** for serving sizes and number of calories, and consider **portion size**.

To determine how many calories you need each day to maintain your current weight, visit the **NIH Body Weight Planner**. It is not recommended to decrease your daily calories below 1200.

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Daily Tip: Adopt Flexible Thinking

This holiday season and beyond, we challenge you to adopt flexible thinking that will help you **make good decisions, not perfect ones**. Perfectionism can paralyze decision-making and prevent you from achieving your goals. A good decision still moves you in the direction you want even if it does not catapult you to your desired outcome.

When embarking on new goals or habits there will be days that don't proceed as planned and this is where flexible thinking is crucial to long-term success. Competing responsibilities arise daily, and you are faced with choice points. It is in these choice points that we encourage you to practice flexible thinking by making a good decision instead of what you might consider a perfect one.

A small change may not feel as rewarding as a drastic change. However, it will lay the foundation for establishing a habit to integrate into your daily life. When your next choice point comes up, try thinking of one thing you can do that will steer—not catapult—you toward your end goal. For example, you planned to get up early to exercise for 30 minutes but you overslept, and you have a busy day. Rather than throwing in the towel, try to get in some physical activity that day, even if it is a 5-minute walk.

Daily Challenge

There are many physical and mental benefits of taking breaks at work and they can also boost productivity significantly. **Stretching** is a great way to take a quick break in between meetings or intensive work periods. Challenge yourself to get up and briefly stretch every hour of the workday.



Daily Tip: Mindfulness Gives Us Options

As humans, we have the ability of metacognition, which is a big word that describes something most of us do every day probably without even noticing it—that is thinking about our own thoughts. Our ability to think about our thoughts allows us to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is deliberately paying attention to the present moment without judgment. Research shows a myriad of health benefits related to mindfulness: reduced stress, improved chronic pain management, improved immune function, and reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression (1).

Applying mindfulness to specific behaviors can lead to intentional choices instead of responding to external cues, emotions, or your environment. Mindful eating refers to an individual maintaining a non-judgmental awareness of one's physical and emotional sensations while eating or in a food-related environment 1. You can also apply mindfulness to physical activity. Be in the moment and focus on how your body feels during physical activity. After you exercise, assess how you feel—do you feel better, stronger, happier, or less stressed? Notice, but don't judge.

Mindfulness is not a goal-oriented practice and it is not about getting something perfect, rather it is about awareness. Once we have awareness, options open up!

Download the **12 Steps to Mindful Eating**. Incorporating these steps into your life can have transformative results.

1. Dunn, C., Haubenreiser, M., Johnson, M. et al. Mindfulness Approaches and Weight Loss, Weight Maintenance, and Weight Regain. *Curr Obes Rep* 7, 37–49 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13679-018-0299-6> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13679-018-0299-6>

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Daily Tip: Moving & Grooving at Your Own Pace

Do the words “fitness”, “physical activity” or “exercise” suggest a painful process that you have to go through to alter your appearance? This line of thinking will only make you think that “exercise” is not for you. Too often mainstream culture focuses on how exercise will alter your appearance when the conversation should focus on how regular exercise makes your mind and body feel.

Deciding to exercise regularly does not mean you need to train for a triathlon or join an expensive gym. There are no strict rules about how we move our bodies. However, the science is clear—physical activity is necessary for a heart healthy life and is a major contributor to overall health.

Over the next seven weeks, we challenge you to find movement that you enjoy. We cannot overstate the importance of this suggestion. If you choose an activity that has the potential to bring you joy it is much more likely that it will become a sustainable habit. Physical activity can be any occasion that you engage in movement that gets your heart beating faster and makes your muscles work harder than when you are at rest.

Regular physical activity can look like playing with kids or grandkids, dancing, practicing yoga, gardening, doing household chores, or taking the stairs instead of the elevator...the list could run on and on! We encourage you to work towards engaging in 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity and two days of muscle strengthening activities each week, as recommended by the **Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans**. Your chosen activity can be broken up into 2, 5, 10, or 20-minute blocks throughout the day, which will add up each week.

Bottom Line: Find opportunities to move your body, however, and wherever you can because it all benefits your physical and mental health.



Daily Tip: How to Measure Success

We often wait to complete a goal or a big milestone to celebrate. What if we didn't wait and we celebrated early and often? Success is happening all along the way!

There are countless ways to measure success, and they vary widely depending on the individual, the goal, and the context. Following other people's ideas about what success looks like can lead to some pretty awful emotional knots—don't get caught in the **trap of comparison**. Sometimes success looks like simply showing up to the gym or starting a workout no matter the total duration.

Sure, there will be days or even weeks when you feel like you are struggling. **This is OK**. There is often the perception that when you are struggling you are failing. Let's ditch that mindset and acknowledge that struggling means you are trying and trying is progress! You can't work towards the past; you can only work toward the future.

Focus on gradual progress and celebrate your wins—big and small.

Daily Challenge

Calories from beverages can add up quickly throughout the day. Make soda, sports drinks, energy drinks, and sweetened coffees and teas a "sometimes drink." **Rethink your drink and choose water most of the day.**