

# Is It Time to Give Up Your Chronic Dieting?

## **Objective**

To identify the psychological and physical impact of chronic dieting and help you address the obstacles to replacing chronic dieting with simply living a healthy lifestyle.

## **You Should Know**

An estimated 45 million Americans go on diets each year, however, according to WebMD, even when people lose weight, up to 80 percent will gain it back. Many people say that they go on and off diets for much of their adult lives, which typically leads to frustration, low self-esteem, and even depression. Chronic dieting contracts your world. If you create rules around eating to control your food intake and environment, you may avoid certain restaurants, events, activities, or travel. Even your relationships may become limited from chronic dieting. People who are always on a diet create a constant state of “not being good enough” and they believe their happiness will only come in the future when they are the “right” weight.

Besides the psychological effects of chronic dieting, medical professionals also tell us that this type of lifestyle can result in serious health problems. So-called “yo-yo dieting” has been associated with muscle loss, an increase in body fat, and an increased risk of diabetes and heart disease.

Nutritionists generally agree that a much better approach to dieting is to simply adopt a healthy lifestyle, which includes nutritious eating, regular exercise, and learning healthy ways to deal with stress. Even the well-known weight loss company Weight Watchers has recently shifted its focus from its popular diet to an emphasis on healthy living, using the new tagline “Wellness That Works.”

The worksheet on the next page can help you examine how chronic dieting has affected your life. The statements and questions that follow will help you explore obstacles that prevent you from living a healthy lifestyle and finding self-acceptance.

## How Has Dieting Impacted Your Life?

Directions: Select the statements that describe your attitudes about eating and dieting.

- I avoid eating in social situations or avoid situations altogether if food is involved.
- I worry about what people think about my body or the way that I eat.
- I compare what I eat (quantity and type) to what other people eat.
- I eat differently when other people are present.
- I constantly worry about food and/or eating.
- I have strict rules about food and/or eating.
- I fantasize about food.
- I'm preoccupied with thoughts about what I eat and don't eat.
- I count calories, carbs, fat grams, or other factors about food.
- Foods are either good or bad.
- I'm afraid of feeling too full.
- I don't trust my body.
- I feel guilt or shame if I eat "bad" foods.
- I worry that if I eat forbidden foods I will lose control and be unable to stop eating.
- I experience mood swings.
- I engage in binge eating.
- I avoid physical intimacy because I feel fat.
- I frequently discuss food, weight, or dieting.
- I ignore food rules when I'm on vacation and eat more than I require.
- I exercise only to burn calories or lose weight.
- I overeat when I'm upset or stressed.
- If I overeat I compensate in some way (e.g., skipping meals).
- If I break my eating rules I end up bingeing.
- I worry that I will not have enough to eat.
- I can't determine when I'm physically hungry or when I'm satisfied (full).
- Dieting and/or food restriction causes me to be irritable.
- Even when I lose weight, I still feel too fat.
- I am constantly comparing myself to other people and how their bodies look.
- I hate myself when I lose weight and then gain it back.

## Think About It

What do you think would happen if you just stopped dieting? What is your greatest fear?

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Besides eating healthy foods, what else would you consider to be a healthy lifestyle?

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We are all constantly bombarded by cultural messages that suggest we have to be thin to be happy. Make a statement that refutes this unrealistic cultural message.

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How can you get support for replacing chronic dieting with a healthy lifestyle. Write down the names of people or organizations that could support your efforts.

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(**1** = not very helpful, **5** = moderately helpful, **10** = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

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