

# Nutrition Matters

Nutrition Services, Community and Health Services

## Freedom from dieting

There are a lot of news stories related to obesity and obesity-related health problems these days. Media coverage and social pressures to be thin have led many to try dieting. It is no wonder the diet industry is a multi-billion dollar industry, and growing!

Currently, about one in three Canadians is trying to lose weight, and of these, one in three is dieting. Though both men and women can have a poor body image, women are more likely to try dieting. Many women are unhappy about their weight and their looks; one recent survey showed that 85 to 90 per cent of all women dislike their bodies.

### Do diets work?

Studies show that 75% of people who start diets fall off the diet in less than one year. In addition, most people regain all the weight, and sometimes more, within five years. For the majority of people, diets simply don't work for long-term weight loss.

### So why are diets so popular?

We've all heard the common slogans such as "rapid weight loss", "no diet or exercise required", "eat whatever you want" or "take it off and keep it off"! Advertisers use lines like these to get us to buy their product or service. People caught up in the idea of quick weight loss, without considering whether the diet, product or service is effective and safe.

**Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.**

### What is wrong with dieting?

"Diets" teach us that there are "good" foods and "bad" foods. But eating habits are measured over time, not by one food, meal or day alone. There are no good or bad foods; it's the balance of what you eat on a regular basis that counts.

Dieting can be dangerous, deprive us of important nutrients and leave us tired and irritable. Diets can isolate us socially and set us up for further weight gain as well as a sense of failure. If followed for a long period of time, diets can result in health problems such as muscle weakness, constipation, high cholesterol levels, and vitamin-mineral deficiencies.



### Healthy eating is the way to go

Healthy eating is not about "should" or "shouldn't", nor is it about depriving ourselves. Healthy eating means enjoying a wide variety of foods from the four food groups of Canada's Food Guide, and eating size-wise portions. It also means tuning into our natural feelings of hunger, eating when we are hungry and stopping when we are full. And finally, healthy eating means not feeling guilty for enjoying food.

**Healthy body weight – what is success?**

A lower number on the scale or a smaller pant size achieved by strict dieting is not success.

While it is true that excess body fat can increase your risk for diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and some cancers, remember that healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes!

We must be realistic about our bodies and recognize that genetics play an important role in determining how we look and how much we weigh.



**Better health can be achieved at any body size, as long as we practice healthy habits such as eating well, being active and having a positive self-esteem.**

So, rather than focusing so much on the number on the scale, put more effort into living actively and enjoying a variety of foods in moderate quantities. These habits will increase your chances of success at achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight.

**The “magic bullet” approach – buyer beware!**

The diet industry promotes many diet-related programs and products, such as weight loss pills, specialized foods, supplements, and equipment that claim to melt fat away.



Many of the claims and advertisements around these products are misleading. These products often promise “quick and easy”, in other words, “miraculous” results. They usually contradict the basic principles of a healthy lifestyle, which include healthy eating and active living. Ads often lack scientific proof to support their claims, and use misleading consumer testimonials, “expert” endorsements, and other deceptive techniques to trick consumers into purchasing their product.

Be aware of advertisements for weight loss products and services that claim any of the following: rapid weight loss, no need for changes in lifestyle, scientifically proven, and money-back guarantees.

Improving your eating and physical activity habits is the *only* magic bullet for achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight.

**Eliminate the quick fix mindset... health is a journey that takes place one day at a time. Eat well today and your body will respond with gratitude and health tomorrow.**

**Go the “Healthy Measures” way!**

Healthy Measures is a concept of health that encourages you to be active, eat well and be yourself. Rather than focussing so much on body weight, focus on the habits that will help you to be healthy.



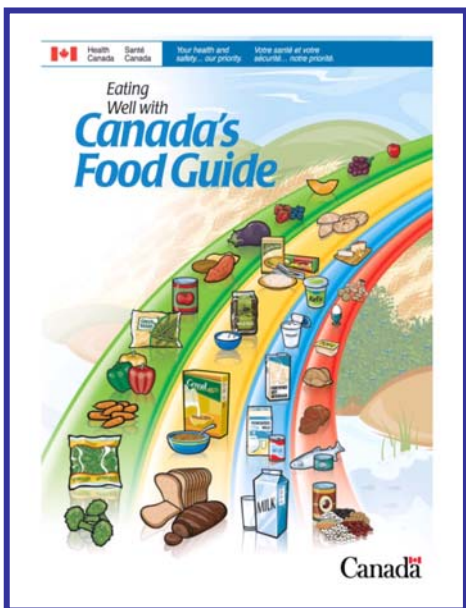
**Here are some Healthy Measures tips:**

**Change the way you see – not the way you look**

Instead of asking, “How can I lose weight?”, ask yourself, “What can I do to be healthier and happier?” Nurture yourself with a healthy attitude for life.

**Follow the Guides**

Canada’s Food Guide and Canada’s Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living are excellent tools to help you improve your eating and physical activity habits. To obtain a copy, call York Region Health Services, Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653 or visit [www.healthcanada.ca](http://www.healthcanada.ca).



**Is it really hunger you’re feeling?**

Often times what we think may be a feeling of hunger may actually be boredom, stress, a feeling of thirst, or a need for sleep, fresh air or a change of pace.

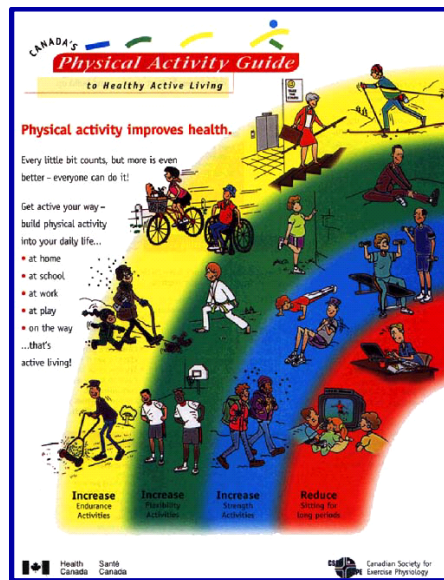
**Tip:** Ask yourself when you last had a meal or snack. Find out what you are really feeling.



**Be active your way, every day!**

Find forms of physical activity that you enjoy. Aim for at least 30-60 minutes of physical activity daily. You can do it all at once or in 10-minute sessions throughout the day. It all adds up. Just remember to stick to it and make it fun.

**Tip:** Build activity into your daily routine, whether it means walking the dog, taking the stairs, or playing sports with your kids – every effort counts!

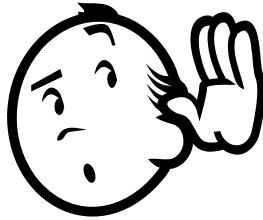


### **Remember the fashion world isn't reality**

Advertising, fashion magazines, the entertainment industry and media promote an unrealistic body shape. Look around you - there are a lot more people like you than like "them". Feel good in your own size.

### **Listen to your body**

Many of us have lost touch with our ability to tell when we are hungry and when we are full. This is especially true for "dieters". The body has a natural way of letting us know how much food to eat and when to stop. Success is paying attention to what your body is telling you.



### **Here are some tips on how you can "re-tune" into your body:**

- **Pay attention to your hunger cues**  
Are you really hungry? Pay attention to how your stomach is feeling before, during and after eating. Learn the difference between your body's "need to eat" hunger feeling and your desire to eat more food because of other reasons. Learn to recognize your "just full" feeling; if you feel uncomfortable, you've eaten more than you need.  
**Tip:** Use smaller plates or put less food on your plate. Studies show that larger portions encourage us to eat more, even if we don't really like the food!
- **Space your meals and snacks throughout the day.** Starving yourself often leads to stuffing yourself; eat before you feel that gnawing emptiness in your stomach.

**Tip:** Eat when your body tells you it's running out of fuel. This may be every three to four hours. For example, eating a healthy snack in the afternoon may help take the edge off your hunger and prevent you from overeating at dinner.

- **Slow down your eating...enjoy your food!** Take time to taste and enjoy each mouthful! Your body will send you the message that you are full, but it takes about 20 minutes. As you slow down, you will learn to recognize your "just full" feeling before you eat more than you need. It's okay to satisfy a craving but learn to enjoy each bite. Remember, digestion begins in the mouth, so chew your food thoroughly.  
**Tip:** To help slow your eating and enjoy your food, learn to put your fork down between each bite.

### **Take it one step at a time**

Small changes to your eating and activity habits can result in large benefits to your health. Making small changes over a longer period of time will increase your chances of success. For example, enjoy one more fruit each day or make a commitment to start your day off with a healthy breakfast. Each small step adds to a healthier you.

### **Reward yourself**

When you achieve one of your healthy eating or activity goals, reward yourself with a small gift, a new CD or DVD, a good book or take a day off in the middle of the week. Appreciate yourself.

**Change doesn't happen by chance. It takes thought and preparation - give yourself some time to make changes.**