

# How to Lose Weight on a Budget

Fad diets and the latest trendy fitness classes can be pricey. However, you don't actually need to drop big bucks in order to lose weight. Try these 9 tricks to lose weight sensibly and save money at the same time.



## 1. Plan to Cook at Home

Instead of buying costly prepared meals, which often tend to be high in calories, cook your own at home. With a few good recipes and a shopping list, you can make your own delicious low-calorie meals. According to one study, planning out your meals for the whole day really does help you lose weight. High-fiber foods like beans and whole grains, cooked from scratch, will keep you full and are a cheaper, healthier alternative to not-so-lean proteins and more-processed grains.



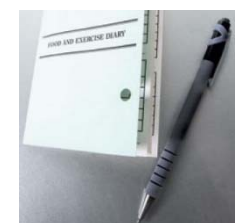
## 2. Take the Guesswork Out of Portion Control

Some weight-loss programs work because they pre-portion meals for you. Studies show that almost everyone—heavy people and thin ones, nutrition experts and normal folks—underestimates how much they're eating a lot of the time. Instead of buying expensive pre-portioned meals, get acquainted with proper portion sizes so you can help cap overeating. Get started by using a kitchen scale or measuring cups to measure proper servings of your favorite foods. Do this a few times until you can eyeball portions. And try making recipes that offer built-in portion control, like mini meatloaves in muffin tins or casseroles that are easy to divide evenly.



## 3. Make Your Own 100-Calorie Snack Packs

Pull out your measuring cups, get yourself a simple kitchen scale—and measure out individual servings of your favorite healthy snacks (whole-grain crackers, nuts, etc.) to pack up in reusable containers or small zip-top bags. You'll keep a cap on portion sizes and avoid the cost markup that's tacked on to those small packaged snacks. For a super-affordable and waist-conscious snack, make homemade popcorn your go-to snack. Popcorn kernels don't cost much and you can air-pop them in the microwave. Just put 2 tablespoons of popcorn kernels in a brown paper lunch bag, fold over several times to seal and cook it in the microwave for a couple minutes (or less...as with other microwave popcorn. Wait until you hear the pops start to get less frequent). Three cups of popped popcorn contains 3 grams of fiber and just 105 calories, provided you don't add butter, and it's a whole grain!



## 4. Keep Track of Everything You Eat

Studies show that writing down everything you eat helps you lose weight. You can use a notebook and pencil or try one of the many free food-tracking apps, like Lose It! The key is to write down everything you eat...it'll make you more aware of what you're eating and rein in mindless snacking.



## 5. Get Creative with Your Exercise Options

You don't need to shell out a monthly gym fee to get moving. Instead, find fun activities you enjoy for free. If you're just getting started with a regular exercise routine, try beginning with daily walks: start slow and build up time and speed. Other ideas for no-cost activity include jogging, hiking, dancing and simple strength-training moves like pushups. Or look for free workout or yoga videos online.





### 6. Buddy Up

One of the most powerful resources you have for helping you lose weight—and keep it off—is your social network. Find a buddy who is also trying to lose weight and agree to help each other stay motivated. One study found that when friends participated in a group weight-loss program together, they lost more weight—and were more successful in keeping it off—than people who did the same program on their own. And a 2011 study found that when co-workers were put into two groups and competed together for the biggest weight loss, they dropped more weight than people who followed a worksite weight-loss program alone.



### 7. Treat Yourself

Having an incentive for reaching your weight-loss goals can certainly be motivating, but such treats needn't break the bank (and they shouldn't involve food either). Yes, a weekend at the spa would be nice, but so, perhaps, would a new bottle of nail polish for a home-pedi. Or give yourself a "night off" from your to-dos to simply relax with a rented movie.



### 8. Double Up on Vegetables

Vegetables are great for weight loss, as well as all-around health. They're low in calories and high in water and fiber—two things that keep you feeling full. Save cash by shopping for those that are in season. Frozen veggies can be a great bargain, with just as much nutrition as fresh, since they're picked and frozen at their peak ripeness.



### 9. Eat Less

Yes, of course, eating less leads to weight loss—and cost savings, especially if you cut down on the right things. Start by cutting your portions of pricy meat and poultry to the recommended 3-ounce serving. Or swap out meat and poultry for cheaper vegetarian proteins like beans, lentils, tofu and eggs for some of your meals. And if you're eating out, eat half of a main course and save the other half for lunch tomorrow—an easy way to stretch your budget and whittle your waistline.

Source: [www.eatingwell.com](http://www.eatingwell.com)

