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MEDIA BAKERY

# Keeping it off

## Smart strategies for long-term weight loss

By Jane Langille

LIKE SO MANY times before, last year's crash diet worked for a while and then the weight came back. It's clear the weight-loss puzzle needs solutions that work for the long term, without suffering or feeling as if one is starving.

Meet Costco member Ann Douglas, an author and mother of four from Peterborough, Ontario. When she was turning 50, she decided she wanted to enter midlife without the added health risks linked to obesity, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, several types of cancer and chronic back pain.

Douglas had tried to lose weight several times before, but this time she put the behaviour of successful weight-loss maintainers to work to build habits she could incorporate into her daily life—forever. Her results were remarkable: In January 2013, she weighed 130 kilograms (286 pounds); by the end of December, she had dropped 46 kilograms (102 pounds). In 2014, she lost another 12 kilograms (26 pounds) to reach 72 kilograms

(158 pounds). Her ultimate goal is to reach 70 kilograms (154 pounds), the top weight for a healthy body mass index of 24.9 for her 1.7 metre (5-foot-6-inch) frame.

Douglas tapped into the National Weight Control Registry (NWCR; [nwcr.ws](http://nwcr.ws)), an ongoing study of more than 10,000 people who have lost large amounts of weight and kept it off. On average, study participants have shed 30 kilograms (66 pounds) and maintained the loss for five and a half years. Founded in 1994, the NWCR is coordinated through The Miriam Hospital's Weight Control and Diabetes Research Center, in Rhode Island. It is widely cited by Canadian and international obesity experts as a reference for evidence-based weight-loss strategies that work.

Douglas started by facing her fears and designing an action plan. "I connected with my personal motivation and talked to family and friends about my plans and my fear of failure," she says. "I designed my own diet plan around vegetables, fresh fruits and lean protein sources, and used MyFitnessPal, an online food diary app, to track food choices and learn how to fuel my body for energy and curb cravings."

And, for the first time, Douglas added physical activity. At first, she couldn't walk far, but as the weight came off, her endurance built



### In our digital editions

Click here to hear about connecting with your personal, deeper motivation for wanting to lose weight. (See page 7 for details.)

up to the point where she now walks at least 10,000 steps daily and keeps track with her Fitbit activity tracker. She says, "Exercise has really been the key, allowing me to consume a decent amount of food and manage day-to-day stress. In the past, I just restricted food, and that doesn't give you a lot of calories to play with when you are trying to lose weight."

"Overall, I made changes that I can sustain for the long term, because I intend to be doing this for the rest of my life," she continues. "I'm very happy to share my story, because so many people have helped me along the way. It's the least I can do to try to offer others some encouragement."

### Experts weigh in

Fast results may provide short-term gratification, but the truth is crash diets just don't work in the long run. "Crash diets are all about temporary behaviour change. People can lose weight on them, but when they're not able to maintain those behaviour patterns, their weight reverts back to its previous level," says James O. Hill, NWCR co-founder and founding executive director of the Anschutz Health and Wellness Center at the University of Colorado.

A healthy diet and daily activity are both important for sustainable weight loss. "There's nothing more valuable to a person's health than regular exercise. Unfortunately, though, it's not the ticket to the weight-loss express. Weight is lost in the kitchen, while health is

## How to keep it off

NWCR PARTICIPANTS REPORT that they continue to consume a low-calorie, low-fat diet and perform higher levels of physical activity. Here are some of their success habits:

- 90 per cent exercise daily for about an hour.
- Most choose walking as their preferred way to get moving.
- 78 per cent eat breakfast every day.
- 75 per cent weigh themselves at least once a week.
- 62 per cent watch less than 10 hours of television weekly.—JL

### The Costco Connection

Costco members will find a variety of fresh and frozen foods, exercise equipment, scales and other products designed to help them lose weight and improve their health in the warehouses and at Costco.ca.

gained through physical activity. If you're hoping to improve health and lose weight, you'll need to make friends with both," says Dr. Yoni Freedhoff, a family doctor, and founder and medical director of Ottawa's Bariatric Medical Institute for non-surgical weight management.

Research shows that using a food diary to keep track of daily food intake can double weight-loss results. "Studies have repeatedly shown that self-monitoring dietary intake is one of the most powerful tools in long-term weight management, whether you keep track of calories, points or food. In the NWCR, counting calories was one of the top strategies and was employed by over 40 per cent of registrants," says Freedhoff.

It's often said that losing 0.5 to 1 kilogram (1 to 2 pounds) a week is the best strategy for long-term success, but Hélène Charlebois, a registered dietician and nutrition consultant in Ottawa, and a member of the Canadian Obesity Network, says, "Slow and steady is not the only way to go. People in the NWCR have lost weight all kinds of ways. What mat-

ters most is maintenance and sticking to habits that work."

When weight loss slows down or plateaus, Charlebois advises clients not to give up. "When you lose weight, you disrupt many hormones that control hunger and satiety. You need to give your body a chance to catch up. Plateaus can last for months, even up to a year, and that's OK. It's important to embrace imperfection and focus on improved health for life," she tells *The Connection*.

Personal motivation may be the most powerful tool to achieve long-lasting results. "Our major breakthrough is that the mental mindset is probably the area that changes success rates. Transformational weight loss starts with getting in touch with your purpose—what's most important for you to accomplish in your life. It's about how you relate to your world, not just your weight. You have to see this as a permanent journey, not just a temporary change," says Hill. [E]

*Jane Langille is a health writer based in Richmond Hill, Ontario.*



## Top tips for weight-loss victory

HERE ARE SOME of Dr. Freedhoff's top tips for healthy eating without suffering:

- Eat six times a day—three meals and three snacks—to provide steady energy over your day and help manage hunger.
- Eat breakfast within an hour of waking up. People who eat breakfast end up eating less over the day because they are not as hungry.
- Use a food diary to monitor what you eat. Logging takes less than five minutes with smartphone apps like MyFitnessPal.
- Be mindful of your liquid calorie intake.
- Include protein with every meal and snack.—JL

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