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Tips to prevent unintentional weight loss

Unintentional weight loss is when you lose weight without meaning to. This can happen for a number of reasons, including a reduced appetite, illness, changes to your health or changes in your lifestyle.

While weight loss may be beneficial for some people, losing weight is not appropriate for everyone. If you are already within a healthy weight range, are underweight, or are losing weight without trying, it is important to focus on maintaining your weight and getting enough energy and nutrients from your diet.

BMI

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure that uses your height and weight to indicate whether your weight is within a healthy range. You can calculate your BMI using the NHS BMI calculator or by dividing your weight in kilograms (kg) by your height in metres squared (m^2).

BMI ranges differ for people of Asian, Black African, African-Caribbean or Middle Eastern ethnicity. The BMI ranges below can be used as a guide:

Classification	BMI range	BMI range for people of Asian, Black African, African-Caribbean or Middle Eastern ethnicity
Underweight	Below 18.5 kg/m^2	Below 18.5 kg/m^2
Healthy weight	18.5 to 24.9 kg/m^2	18.5 to 22.9 kg/m^2
Overweight	25 to 29.9 kg/m^2	23 to 27.4 kg/m^2
Obese	30 kg/m^2 or above	27.5 kg/m^2 or above

If your BMI is within the healthy or underweight range, or you are experiencing unintentional weight loss, the tips below can help prevent further weight loss.

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Eating well

- Try having smaller, more frequent meals if you find larger meals difficult to manage.
- Include nourishing snacks between meals.
- Try not to fill up on drinks before meals, as this may reduce your appetite.
- Include a source of protein with meals and snacks.
- Add extra energy to meals using foods rich in unsaturated fats, such as nuts, seeds, nut butters, avocado, olive oil or rapeseed oil.
- Choose nourishing drinks, such as milk or fortified alternatives, between meals if you find it difficult to eat enough.
- If your appetite is reduced, focus on making the foods you can manage as nourishing as possible.

Breakfast

- Add nut butter, nuts or seeds to porridge, yoghurt or cereal.
- Make porridge with milk instead of water and add milk powder for extra energy and protein.
- Add avocado or nut butter to toast for extra energy.
- Add a drizzle of olive or rapeseed oil to eggs or other savoury breakfast options.
- If you have a small appetite, choose smaller, energy-dense portions rather than trying to eat a larger breakfast.

Lunch and dinner

- Add olive or rapeseed oil to meals, vegetables, sauces or dressings for extra energy.
- Add avocado, hummus or pesto to sandwiches, wraps, salads or meals.
- Include a source of protein such as eggs, fish, chicken, beans, lentils or tofu with meals.
- Choose oily fish, such as salmon or mackerel, for additional protein and healthy fats.
- Add beans, lentils or chickpeas to soups, stews and other dishes to increase energy and protein.
- If you have a small appetite, add energy-rich ingredients to your usual portion rather than increasing the amount of food you eat.

Snacks

- Have fruit with nut butter for an energy-rich snack.
- Try hummus or guacamole with crackers, pitta bread or vegetable sticks.
- Add fruit, granola, nuts or seeds to yoghurt.
- Have toast with nut butter, cottage cheese or eggs.

Staying active

- Keep active where you can, as regular activity can help support your overall health and wellbeing, including maintaining a healthy weight.
- Include strength or resistance activities, such as lifting weights or bodyweight exercises, as part of your routine to help maintain or increase muscle mass and strength.
- Choose activities that are appropriate for your health, medical conditions, mobility and fitness levels.
- If you are losing weight unintentionally, avoid significantly increasing your activity levels without also making sure you are eating enough to meet your energy needs.
- If you feel weak, unusually tired or unwell during activity, reduce the intensity or stop and speak to your healthcare professional for further guidance.
- Build your activity levels up gradually, particularly if you have been less active due to illness or changes in your health.
- It is normal to experience some muscle soreness when trying a new activity or returning to exercise after a break. Staying hydrated, eating well and getting enough sleep can help your body recover and adapt to increased activity levels.

When to seek further support

If you continue to lose weight without trying, are concerned about your weight or appetite, or are finding it difficult to eat enough, speak to your GP or healthcare professional. They can help identify any underlying causes and advise on the most appropriate support. If you are struggling to meet your nutritional needs through food and drinks, speak to your GP, dietitian or healthcare professional before using nutritional supplements.