

# Three Dietary Tweaks for Weight Loss

Hoping to lose weight in 2021? [Merritt Clubs](#) would love to help!

But before you break a sweat, please stop for a moment to consider your eating habits.

The experts agree: If you want to drop pounds, you should [change how you eat](#). Exercise alone is [unlikely to do the trick](#).

Yet for many of us, "diet" is a four-letter word in more ways than one.

Maybe you feel discouraged or cynical about your ability to stick to a diet. Or maybe you've just been overwhelmed with weight-gain over the past year, thanks to successive months of quarantine, anxiety, and a recent holiday season. Or maybe you just hate change. All of the above, anyone?

Fortunately, you can still make significant improvements to your eating habits without ever adhering to a specific diet plan.

Below are three "dietary tweaks" that can have a huge payoff in terms of weight loss, and in your overall health. And none of them require you to abstain from specific foods or count a single calorie.

## **1. Time-Restricted Eating**

One helpful "tweak" is to stop consuming calories earlier in the evenings, and/or hold off a little longer in the morning before eating breakfast. This is the same concept as "[intermittent fasting](#)". The aim is to go for at least 10 hours (ideally 12 or more) without putting any calories into your mouth. Since much of this can be accomplished while you sleep, it's way easier than it sounds.

Numerous scientific studies have shown that, around the 10-12-hour mark of calorie deprivation, [the body starts burning off its fat stores](#). You can burn more fat by fasting for periods longer than 12 hours, but it is wise to check with your doctor first.

A major side benefit of these 10-12-hour "fasting periods" is that they can help [keep your blood sugar and insulin levels down](#), which reduces food cravings and can help ward off the insulin resistance that leads to diabetes.

## 2. Smaller Portions

Let's face it: Americans eat way too much. [Studies have demonstrated](#) that we tend to put about twice as much food on our plates than we need, and that we tend to "clean" our plates regardless of how much food they contain.

With this in view, one weight-loss "tweak" is to reduce the amount of food that ends up on your plate each meal. This is hard to do at most restaurants, where the portion sizes are often huge. But if you're eating at home (as most of us are these days), then a good rule of thumb is to put about *half* as much food on your plate as you initially want. After all, you can always come back for seconds.

And instead of scarfing down that first plate, try eating slowly, with small bites, while drinking lots of water during the meal. Only after taking those measures should we go back for more. You'll likely find yourself filling up much faster than expected.

And if you do find yourself at a restaurant in the near future, one helpful strategy can be to order a to-go box at the outset of the meal and promptly put a portion of your food on layaway, to become leftovers the next day. That'll save you money as well as calories.

## 3. More Fiber

Fiber does more than fight constipation— [it also fights hunger!](#) Since high-fiber foods take longer to break down, they sit in our digestive tracts for longer and thus make us feel fuller. Plus the prolonged digestion time means a slower blood-sugar release, which helps prevent those powerful food cravings that often arise within an hour or two of a carbohydrate-heavy meal.

Increasing your fiber intake is surprisingly easy and can be done gradually. Start by buying more whole grain products, such as oats, wild rice, whole wheat bread, and quinoa. Substitute regular pasta with the whole grain version. And eat more fruits and veggies. Over time, a high-fiber diet can go a long way in helping you eat less.

## The Bottom Line:

If we want to lose weight in 2021—and keep it off—we need to change our eating habits. After all, it was our eating habits that got us here in the first place.

Following a diet plan for a few months may help us drop some pounds, but if we eventually abandon the diet and return to the way we ate beforehand, we'll just put the pounds back on. Many of us have experienced this, and it's oh-so frustrating!

Instead of bouncing back and forth between good, short-term diets and bad, long-term habits, why not try to gradually change those long-term habits themselves?

The three dietary "tweaks" suggested above are three small steps in that direction.

Happy eating, and Happy New Year!