

FOX NEWS

7 ways to lose weight when you're over 60

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For many of us, life gets better—easier, even—as we get older. We get more comfortable and confident in our own skin. We weed out what doesn't work for us and invite more of what does work into our lives. There's a certain clarity that inspires us not to sweat the small stuff so much and to keep the big picture in mind.

If only exercise, healthy eating, and weight loss fell into that "it gets easier with age" category.

Instead, dropping pounds can often feel harder than ever. After all, that stiff back that keeps you from bounding out of bed in the morning can make it less inspiring to go to the gym, a busy schedule can prompt you to eat on the run, and those 10 pounds you

gained in your 40s can become an extra 20 pounds in your 50s and, well, you get the idea. (Want to lose weight but just don't have the time to hit the gym? Then you need Prevention's new [Fit in 10 DVD](#) for super effective 10-minute workouts!)

Yet experts agree it's important to focus on achieving your healthy weight no matter the number of candles on your birthday cake this year.

"Excess fat is something we shouldn't ignore no matter how old we are," said **Dr. Robert Huizenga**, the physician featured on The Biggest Loser.

And while it can be tempting to throw in the towel, thinking you're fighting an uphill battle at 60-something, compared with your 20- and 30-something counterparts, he has some interesting news: "There has actually been no difference in the amount or rate of weight loss in individuals of either sex who are over 60 years old versus those who are younger on the 17 seasons of the Biggest Loser show," Huizenga said.

So, while it might feel a little tougher (damn you, sore back), it is possible.

Michael Spitzer, a personal trainer and author of "Fitness at 40, 50, 60 and Beyond," agreed, adding that "the true path to weight control and fitness after age 60 isn't that much different than it is at any other stage of life. However, there are certain factors that need special consideration."

For starters, it's even more important than ever to actually follow the advice to talk to your doc before beginning any new exercise regimen.

"Medical problems, such as heart disease and metabolic disease, become more common after age 60, so it becomes much more important to have a medical checkup before attempting a fat loss plan," Huizenga said.

Then there's the fact that over the age of 60, your oxygen intake may be reduced by as much as one-third of what it was when you were 25, causing you to have a tougher time taking deep breaths when you're exercising at a moderate to high intensity, and making it crucial to ease in to a new plan. Finally, this is the decade when your hips, knees, and other key joints are more likely to develop arthritis, which means that your old go-to running or aerobics workouts may need to be swapped for swimming and/or gentle walking plans.

The good news? These expert-approved tips will help you clean up your diet, lose excess weight, and set you up for better health in your 60s, 70s, and beyond.

Tip No. 1: Focus on fat loss, not weight loss.

At last, it's time to toss that scale that's collecting dust under your bathroom vanity. "At

advanced ages, you cannot afford to lose muscle, organ tissue, or bone mass," says Huizenga, "which means focusing on the number on the scale is especially inappropriate." Instead, invest in a body fat measurement tool (such as calipers or an electrical impedance device) or simply just measure your waist size. The general rule of thumb is that your waist size should be no more than half your height. So, a woman who's 5' 4" (or 64 inches) should have a waist size no larger than 32 inches; a man who's 5' 9" (or 69 inches) should have a waist no larger than 34.5 inches.

Tip No. 2: Drink plenty of water.

Of course, this is a tip for anyone trying to lose weight and boost her overall health, but it's especially important as we get older. That's because as we age, the hypothalamus (which controls our hunger and thirst) becomes desensitized, dulling our thirst signals, says Matt Essex, founder of ActiveRx Aging Centers in Arizona.

"Plus, many older people avoid drinking water so they can avoid running to the bathroom constantly," added Christen Cooper, RD, a dietitian in Pleasantville, NY. "This is especially true for men with prostate issues and women with bladder limitations."

Since water is key for digestion and metabolism—and our bodies can easily mistake thirst for hunger, which causes us to eat more than we actually need—it's important to make sure you're getting enough. You might set an alarm on your phone at regular intervals so you're reminded to keep sipping throughout the day.

Tip No. 3: Add strength training to your routine.

You know that muscle mass decreases with age. (At age 50, you've got about 20 percent less muscle mass than you did when you were 20, and unfortunately it only goes downhill from there.) You also know that muscle loss equals a slower metabolism, which explains why you're more likely to put on (and hold on to) those extra pounds that seem to creep up with every birthday. But there is something you can do about it: lift weights.

Of course, if you don't have a consistent weight training regimen, you'll want to start slowly and lift light weights; this will give your body time to adapt without placing too much strain on your muscles or joints and help you avoid injury, Huizenga said.

However, don't get too comfortable with an easy resistance-training program. It is important to aim to gradually increase the amount of weight you lift. "It's critical that significant resistance exercise be incorporated into any fat loss plan over age 60." Once you can do 10 to 12 reps with, say, a 5-pound dumbbell and feel like you could keep going, it's time to upgrade to an 8-pound weight, and so forth.

"You know you're lifting the right amount of weight if you can just barely make it to the end of your repetitions before needing to rest," he said.

Tip No. 4: Load up on protein.

If ever there was a time to focus on getting enough lean protein, it's now. "There is some evidence that older adults need more protein," said Susan Bowerman, RD, a

dietitian in Los Angeles. A study at the University of Arkansas found that increasing protein intake could help older adults build muscle. That can help counteract age-related muscle loss, Bowerman said.

Aim for roughly 30 grams at each meal, and more if you tend to crave carb-rich foods. "In my practice, I notice that dietary patterns tend to shift somewhat with age, and as people get older, the calories that were once spent on lean protein might now be spent on carbohydrates or fats." Not only does adequate protein help support muscle growth and repair (which, when coupled with resistance training, will help increase metabolic rate and overall calorie burn), but it's also more satiating than carbs and fats, meaning you'll be less likely to reach for unhealthy snacks, Bowerman said.

Tip No. 5: Be patient.

While it's just as possible to reach your healthy weight at 60-something as it is when you were 20-something, it might take a little longer. You might not be able to push yourself as hard as you'd like to during workouts, leading to a lower calorie-burn than you used to hit. Or, you may not be as strong as you once were, prompting you to lift lighter weights (also lowering that calorie-burn number you see on your heart rate monitor). "Keep your focus on the healthy behaviors you're adopting in order to achieve your goal, rather than your frustration if it's not happening right away," Bowerman said.

If you stick to a healthy diet and exercise plan, "your weight will take care of itself over time."

Tip No. 6: Stretch yourself.

Literally. The more flexible you are, the more you will enjoy any physical activity you do and the less chance you'll have of hurting yourself, said Rami Aboumahadi, a nationally certified personal trainer. And at 60+, a less active lifestyle and an increase in aches and pains can make your flexibility plummet. Consider taking a yoga class or even simply adding a few stretches to your day, particularly after you've taken a walk or warmed up your muscles in some other way. Get started with these [6 feel-good yoga stretches](#).

Tip No. 7: Change your attitude.

If you've got phrases like "Gaining weight is part of the aging process" or "Everybody my age is overweight" on repeat, it's time for new mantras, Cooper said.

"It's important to avoid slipping into a mindset that will prevent you from losing weight," he said.

Find a crowd of like-minded peers who want to get fit and stay that way so that you surround yourself with as much support as possible. Perhaps you can find (or form!) a walking group, or talk a few friends into joining you for water aerobics at the local pool. "Too often, what limits us from achieving our weight loss goals is all psychological."

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