

HOWTO: Lose weight

March 1, 2010

[Original link](#)

The standard advice for losing weight is to eat less and exercise.

Exercise is almost worthless as a weight-loss strategy: the number of calories you burn through exercise is miniscule and typically more than made up by your instinct to eat a little extra after exercising. Increased exercise is a *consequence* of losing weight, not a cause — when you lose weight you will have more energy and it will be easier to move, so you will then exercise. You have to lose weight first.

That leaves eating less. I have found three strategies to be effective here:

1. **Get rid of all snacks.** It used to be when I was hungry, I'd just grab a snack from the kitchen. It got so I basically did this without thinking and, as a result, I ended up eating a lot of snacks. Now the only food I have is unprepared; if I want to eat, I have to consider it and take the time to actually cook something or travel to someplace that sells prepared food.
2. **Drink more water.** There are [lots of reasons](#) to drink more water, but it's also a great way to lose weight. A lot of what feels like hunger is actually thirst, while having water in your stomach seems to counteract certain feelings of hunger. Furthermore, burning fat requires extra water.
3. **Don't be afraid to be hungry.** This is no doubt my most controversial tactic, but I do tend to think the body has a “set point” for the number of calories it's used to consuming. Lowering that set point may mean ignoring a bout of hunger or two and possibly even going a whole day without eating. But after that, your body gets full after eating much less. Again: I'm not saying more than a day — this isn't anorexia — but a one-day fast is far from unheard of.

This may be easier for me since I almost always eat meals alone, making it no big deal if I skip them. People who eat meals with others may need to get used to only eating a side dish or just nibbling at their order.

Losing weight has been better than I ever imagined. Not only am I dramatically thinner, but I have more energy, I waste less time eating, and I now like the way I look. I'm much more flexible and mobile and, most incredibly, I've gotten taller — this at the age of 23. (A lot of people are skeptical that I've actually grown taller, but the changes are measurable and dramatic and come with all the symptoms of height growth I remember from my childhood (including the

strange urge to stretch vertically on a regular basis). I suppose it's possible the height difference simply results from better posture, but that seems worth counting.)

I do not propose a new diet or some new theory. These are very simple commonsense tips: remove temptation, get enough water, remove obligation. But I've found they've been enough for me to lose dramatic amounts of weight. I used to be embarrassingly chubby, now people worry I have anorexia.