

What you can do

By [Lucinda Dillon Kinkead](#)

Deseret Morning News

The Utah Department of Health offers the general public the following tips on ways to achieve a healthy weight:

Be aware

Many of us fall into unhealthful "patterns of living." Start thinking about your health and your habits by asking yourself the following questions:

- What are some barriers that keep you from being healthy? Can you change at least one pattern or habit?
- How does your daily diet stack up? Know what your average daily calorie intake should be to maintain a healthy weight. Go to www.mypyramid.gov for personalized dietary recommendations.
- Do you know what the recommendations are for physical activity? The U.S. surgeon general suggests 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity activity daily. It's easier than you think. Check www.hearhighway.org/guidelines.html#adults for more information.
- Do you know what your "body mass index" is? Go to www.checkyourhealth.org/bmi_calc.htm to compute your own BMI.

Be active, eat wisely

A good caloric balance (your consumption vs. your output) is key to maintaining a healthy weight. Studies estimate that the difference between gaining and losing weight over a one-year period comes down to only about 19 calories per day. That's a difference of just 2 ounces of soda or gardening or biking for 4-5 minutes. When trying to lose weight, start by making small changes in your behavior.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Keep a pair of walking shoes at work and go for walks on your breaks or lunch; 10-15 minutes of physical activity at a time can yield health benefits.
- Take the stairs whenever you can.
- Walk while doing errands. Look at www.utahwalks.org to find out more about the benefits of walking.
- Make family time active time. Enjoy an afternoon bike ride with your kids.

- Control portion sizes. Go to www.checkyourhealth.org/nutrition/portiondistortion/pd_facts.htm to find out how portion sizes have grown over the past 20 years.
- Watch out for liquid calories — limit soda consumption.
- Exercise or stretch while watching TV.
- Keep "screen time" (TV, computer games, videos) to a minimum — no more than two hours per day.
- Choose activities you enjoy the most. You'll be more likely to stick with them.

Be an advocate

The makeup of our environments — where we live, work, learn and play — strongly affects our health. If we are in places that encourage healthy habits, and make them easy choices, we are more likely to benefit.

Think about where you spend the majority of your time and what types of choices you have in those places. Try the following to improve your environments:

- Be an advocate for safe and convenient places to be active in your neighborhood.
- Make sure snacks and lunches offered at work functions are healthy.
- Find out if your employer offers incentives or rewards for healthy behavior.
- Support healthy food options in school cafeterias and vending machines.
- Breastfeeding is a very early way to begin a life filled with good health and benefits both the child and mother, but nursing is not always easy for new moms. You can help by contributing to a relaxing home environment — drop off healthy meals or snacks for mom, or volunteer to do some housework. Go to www.utahbreastfeeding.org/index.php for more.