Tips for HEALTHY weight loss, diet, and fitness

Sugar is a problem. Be aware how much hidden sugar you are eating in your diet. Most processed foods have high levels of sugar (in one form or another) in them even and often particularly the diet ones. Most cereals have loads of sugar, as do fizzy drinks and fruit juice.

Chemical sweeteners are as bad as sugar eg aspartame, sucralose etc. Studies have shown chemical sweeteners have a similar impact on your body to sugar. They do not help you lose weight and are certainly not healthy. Many diet foods have chemical sweeteners in them. Better to avoid them most of the time. The only sugar substitute that appears currently not to be harmful is **Stevia** which is a natural product. Also sold as **Natvia**.

If you have Type II diabetes already, then there is good evidence that a Mediterranean diet is one of the most effective. No, it's not pizza and pasta! It is most of the things below.

Fat is not bad for you and can help you burn calories if it is the right type of fat. Also your body needs fats. Olive oil, avocado oil, coconut oil, and avocados are all good for you. Small amounts of saturated fats found on meat is also not a big problem. Trans fats are the worst type of fat - those found in processed and junk food - and are best avoided as much as possible. Canola oil and vegetable oil is also best avoided. Read labels.

Eggs are a good source of protein and are healthy and natural. Fresh and free range are best.
Fish is a good source of omega 3's. Especially fish like tuna and salmon.
Butter is more natural and better for your health than margarine in most cases.

Dark chocolate is good for you. It has lots of cocoa which is an antioxidant. Also it has less sugar. 70% or more cocoa is best. Don't eat mountains of it, but a few squares is good.

Carbohydrates are fine *but* eat healthy carbs. Lots of processed food and grains (cereal, bread, wheat pasta, muffins, cakes, biscuits, etc) are not a good source of carbs. If you are going to have them try to have high fibre versions as this slows down the bodies sugar absorption rate. Vegetables, some fresh fruit (especially berries), non-wheat grains and some nuts/seeds are really good for you. The less processed the better and that also means *more fibre*.
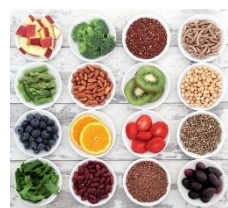
Fibre is also essential for a healthy diet. Fresh food has more fibre than processed food. Leave the skin on wherever possible. Research is suggesting that a diet high in fibre is associated with a decrease in dementia rates. It also helps to populate the gut with beneficial bacteria essential for good health. If you are not getting enough fibre through your food intake, think of adding in something like Metamucil or psyllium husks. Aim for about 25g - 30g a day.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are *vital*. Eat plenty of fresh vegetables in particular, as they are full of nutrients and fibre which your body needs to be healthy and to make your skin glow and your hair shine not to mention all the more essential things. Eat a good variety and plenty of greens. Not "liking" vegetables is not an excuse. Vegetables are essential. *Find ways of eating them that you like.* Being thinner but tired, listless, with bad skin and lank hair and worse health is **not** the goal.

If you are going to eat bread go for sprouted grain breads and non wheat options. Gluten is a problem for a lot of people, as is wheat. Lessening your intake may help enormously. Many people feel bloated from gluten and wheat products. Have breads, pasta, rice, cakes and so on occasionally rather than frequently.

Some people have issues with **dairy foods**. If you suspect you may be one of them, try taking diary out of your diet for a while and see if it makes a difference.

Too much **caffeine** can be a real problem especially if you are anxious, stressed, or have difficulty sleeping. People have different sensitivity to caffeine, so it worth experimenting with cutting down and see what effect it has.

How much to eat. Most people in our society overeat. Be aware of your portion sizes. Eat slowly so your body has time to give you a full signal, or stop eating before you are full but are just satisfied. You can also work out your calorie needs based on your current weight and how active you are. Current weight in pounds X 12 if you are sedentary (desk job) X 13 if you are moderately active and X 14 if you are highly active. Then if you want to lose weight lower your calorie intake by 500-600 calories or more. (To convert from calories to kilojoules times by 4.2. To convert pounds to KG. 1 kg = 2.2 pounds or 1 lb is .45 of 1 kg.) Do not lower it too much as you may lose energy and feel lethargic. Having a day a week where you eat very few calories is good, but eating less than 1000 calories (4200 kj) a day every day *for long periods* is not healthy. However for shorter periods it may be fine to reduce to even as low as 800 a day.

Exercise is good for you! But you do not need to do long rigorous workouts. Do something you enjoy and will keep up. Short bursts of high intensity also are very efficient; Or what is called interval training - warm up for 2 minutes then 30 seconds going very hard followed by 90 seconds at a slow pace. Repeat for 4 to 8 times. That will be about 10 to 20 minutes. You can do this on a cross trainer, or a bike or using skipping rope. But just going for a brisk walk most days is better than doing nothing ... or cycle, swim, dance, yoga, pilates, skip, skate,

jog, etc. There is something everyone can do. Most exercise does not cost anything or does not cost very much. And certainly it is less costly than chronic bad health or disease.

Doing some weight bearing exercise is also very good for you as it increases bone density and improves muscle tone. Exercise is also good for stress, anxiety and depression. For the elderly, it is protective in terms of dementia and is good for balance. Make sure you exercise properly so as not to increase the likelihood of injury. And also don't overdo it. You body also need time to recuperate.

In short - eat plenty of fresh food rather than packaged and diet food. Cut down your sugar intake significantly (including the invisible sugar in lots of processed foods and drinks). Eat healthy fats rather than unhealthy ones. Cut down less healthy carbs. Make sure you get enough protein to satisfy hunger. Drink plenty of water. Exercise regularly. If you don't move it, you lose it :)

Think about having a very light eating day (a semi fast) once or twice a week with no alcohol, sugar, and very little processed food and also a few glasses of water.

Only weigh in once a week or less if you obsess about weight. Your weight will vary up and down over the day and over a few days. As long as you are trending down, if trying to lose weight, then that is good. Do not obsess about never eating "bad" foods. Just eat mostly healthy foods. Focus on eating well, feeling good, being active, and being healthy. If you have a blow out just accept it and get back to healthy eating again. The odd piece of pizza or slice of cake is not going to make a difference. It is when you eat those things all the time it is a problem.

Recording what you eat can help you be aware of it, but if you have a tendency to obsess and use it punitively on yourself, then probably best to avoid that. Otherwise it is fine to weigh in daily and also to record what you eat and how much you exercise. Research has repeatedly shown that when you record faithfully, then it changes behaviour. Try an app like "MyFitnessPal" which makes it easy to track your food and exercise and track calories/Kj, fibre, sugar, as well as various nutrients.

The effort will pay off and you will feel much better. And that is the best reward.