

# Losing weight: 7 TOP EXCUSES & how to beat them

Anyone who's ever tried to lose weight knows it's not easy. Dietitian **Nikki Hart** explains why getting started – and sticking to the plan – can be so difficult.

**MOST DIETS START** successfully. But if they were to change your life positively and become life habits, why are there so many 'life memberships' to popular weight-loss programmes? The sad but true answer is that 95% of dieters regain their weight (and more) within 1-2 years. The diet industry knows you'll be back.

For most people, losing weight – while hard – is not the hardest part. Maintaining the 'new' weight is the hard part! It's not as simple as 'eat less to lose fat'. Managing your weight is more about how you feel: the psychology behind the food choice.

## Hunger vs Appetite – Human Eating Behaviour

Hunger and appetite, although they may feel like the same thing, are different.

**Hunger** = a biological/physiological sensation that drives us to find and eat food.

**Appetite** = psychological and social behaviours that influence food choice

Understanding this difference can give us an insight into why we behave the way we do when it comes to eating and weight loss.

## Cravings

Craving a particular food is a behaviour related to appetite. Being presented with chocolates may cause you think you are hungry, but in fact it is palatability

(mouth feel from a past experience) that tempts you to eat the chocolate. Thinking about eating chocolate (cravings) is more likely to be due to the taste of high fat and high sugar. You need strategies to find substitutes for the 'craved' item.

### \* NIKKI'S FOOD SWAPPING SUGGESTIONS:

**Chocolate:** chocolate yoghurt, low-fat milk hot chocolate drinks

**Potato chips:** 'lite' potato chips, bagel chips, pretzels, flavoured popcorn

**Cheese:** low-fat grated (not in a block), you'll use less.

## EMOTIONAL EATING

There are many 'emotional' reasons for eating:

### BEHAVIOUR

**Boredom**

### SOLUTION

Distraction is the key  
Take the focus off food

**Depression**

Stay occupied

**Stress/low self-esteem**

Make time for pampering yourself

**Happy/celebration**

Food is part of tradition,  
so don't deny it



Nikki Hart is a dietitian in private practice in Auckland. She is a nutrition consultant for the NZ Academy of Sport, a sports nutrition lecturer at AUT and a consultant for food companies on nutrition. She appeared as presenter and “evil diet witch” on the TVNZ show “Eat Yourself Whole”, and recently had her first child.

## Barriers – and solutions

When it comes to weight loss there are many barriers to getting started, and to keeping going. Here are seven of the most common, and some strategies you can use to deal with them.

### 1 How can I live without cheese/chocolate/ice cream?

It's important not to label food as 'good' or 'bad'. Feeling guilty about eating favourite 'bad' foods only makes you feel like you have 'failed' your diet quest. Try my food swapping suggestions (see box page 28). Another ploy I use when suggesting food changes to clients is to eat the perceived 'bad' food in a 'good' way'. For example, eat cheese as part of meal, not as a snack food. This way the guilty association is removed because the offending food item is part of a healthy meal. The example in this case would be to use brie on a homemade pizza, instead of on crackers.


If I walk along Auckland's waterfront I always have an ice cream. The trick is to have the non-diet 'bad' food (in this case the ice-cream) in an environment that makes you feel happy. Eating an ice-cream on a sunny day



after a walk allows you to associate happy feelings with a food that normally promotes guilt. Eating ice-cream in this setting also means you have a better chance at controlling the portion – you can select a single serving rather than having a large tub of ice-cream in your freezer at home that you potentially will eat too much of in a single sitting.

Chocolate should be considered in the same way. Try swapping a solid chocolate for a chocolate-flavoured item, such as a low-fat hot chocolate drink or chocolate yoghurt. Another suggestion is to choose a chocolate-covered item not a solid chocolate one – such as 1 mallowpuff with morning tea, not a chocolate bar.

### 2 I hate exercise

In New Zealand it is currently recommended that we all do 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each day. Successful weight-loss maintainers are reported to engage in about an hour of moderate intensity physical activity (such as brisk walking) each day. If you don't like 'planned' activity, find a way to boost 'incidental' activity so that activity and exercise don't feel torturous – try walking to buy your lunch each day, take the stairs not the elevator, give up your car park and use public transport or actively play with your children. 



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### 3 I eat out all the time

Eating out a lot doesn't necessarily mean that you can't eat healthily and lose weight. However, you have to be very selective when ordering food. Try these tips:

- Make sure your water glass is topped up regularly to help with hydration. Sometimes you think you are hungry when in fact you are thirsty!

- The entrée is the part of the meal where the majority of fat is hiding because of the ingredients used. For example, you may think you are choosing something 'light' when you order a Calamari (squid rings) entree and a Caesar salad, BUT the Calamari could be battered/crumbed, fried and served with aioli mayonnaise and the salad may include fried croutons, a creamy dressing and cheese. It's better to choose one main than two entrées.



- If you are selecting a main course based on lean meat, fish or chicken, be aware that fish can be the lowest fat option, followed by the chicken, then red meat, depending on how the meal is cooked. Choose a medium-sized portion – not something large.

- Ask for plain rice or baked potato as an accompaniment rather than fried or mashed potatoes, fries/wedges or fried rice.

- Get the bread basket topped up – as long as you're not adding lashings of butter, or dipping into aioli or oil.

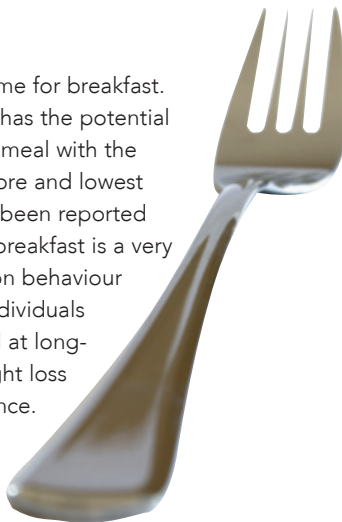
- Order side serves of vegetables or salad if they don't come with the meal – ask that they can be served with salsa, cracked pepper or tomato sauces rather than a buttery sauce.

### 4 I don't have time to eat healthy

We are all 'time poor'! If you don't have time to be healthy, do you have the time to be sick? Most modern diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and gallstones are 'nutritional diseases' that are linked to being overweight and obese!

Taking the time to eat healthily can help protect you from these diseases and can assist with weight loss. It's as easy as ALWAYS

making time for breakfast. Breakfast has the potential to be the meal with the highest fibre and lowest fat. It has been reported skipping breakfast is a very uncommon behaviour among individuals successful at long-term weight loss maintenance.



### Nikki's Top Tips for Ethnic Eating Out

#### JAPANESE:

Miso, sushi, sashimi, noodle dishes, clear soups, tofu

#### CHINESE:

Steamed rice, steamed wontons, chow-meins, braised meat in black bean sauces

#### INDIAN:

Tandoori chicken, steamed rice, vegetable Kormas, naan bread, seafood curries

#### ITALIAN:

Grilled seafood, pasta marinara, tomato-based sauces, fruit and gelatos

#### MEXICAN:

Dairy-free chicken, steamed totillas/burritos, vegetarian chilli, bean-based dishes, fajitas

#### TURKISH/GREEK:

Chicken kebabs, hummus, parsley-rice, couscous, tzatiki, stuffed vine leaves, greek salads

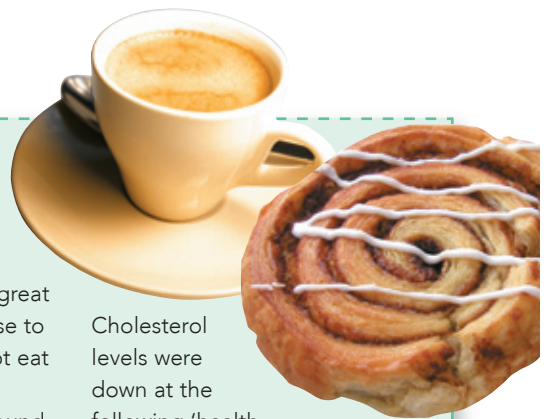
## 5 I don't have any support from family and friends

Sometimes we feel like we don't have the support we really want and need to achieve weight loss. People will often want to help you lose weight but you need to be brave enough to tell them what you are trying to achieve. You may need to learn to communicate better and be realistic in how you expect your support people to behave.

For example, if you regularly meet the girls for 'coffee and cake' why not tell the girls you are trying to lose weight and suggest walking to the café. You

may find yourself feeling so great after the walk that you choose to go halves in the cake and not eat the whole thing.

I have a male client who found that morning tea in his law firm had turned into a sausage roll-eating frenzy! After the firm's annual 'health check' it was discovered that an alarming number of the staff had raised cholesterol. The consumption of pastry and sausage mince were contributing significant saturated fat to people's diets. Sausage rolls now only appear on a Friday.



Cholesterol levels were down at the following 'health check' and so are many of the waistlines!!! Another way to enlist support with your weight-loss quest is to organise the home/flat so that healthy evening meals are made the majority of the time, Sunday through Thursday night, with higher fat meals being reserved for Friday and Saturday nights when we tend to be more social.



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### 6 How do I diet and still cook meals the family will eat?

The trick is to not put yourself on a diet, but to alter the eating style of the whole family so everyone eats healthy. A good way to address this is to pick one or two favourite family meals and find ways to change the composition of the meal without losing its theme. Think of fish and chip takeaways on a Friday night or Mexican nachos.

If you buy fish and chips regularly, try these ideas to make it less of a diet buster:

- buy takeaway fish and reduce the fat content of the meal by either baking oven fries to go with it, or buy a smaller amount of chips and add fresh sliced bread.
- try crumbing and baking the fish and only buying the chips.
- coleslaw or sliced tomato

and lettuce on the plate will reduce the amount of space on the plate for extra chips.

Nachos can be a high-fat meal because the nacho chips are deep-fried, the mince (if not drained) contributes significant saturated fat, cheese and sour cream add saturated fat – although an unsaturated fat – still adds fat to the meal.

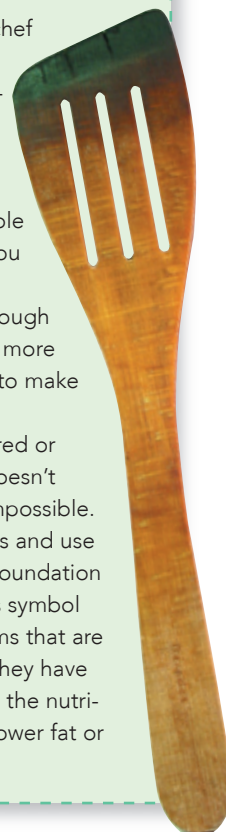
Change this favourite family meal to something healthier:

- use flour tortilla wraps instead of cornchips
- allow the kids to have one wrap and only a small portion of nacho chips
- exchange mince for skinless chicken
- use a low-fat cheese
- exchange lite sour cream for guacamole

### 7 What if I can't/don't cook?

You don't have to be a chef to cook healthy food. Ready-made salads, pre-prepared frozen meals, fresh pastas and many other great tasting and healthy foods are available in most supermarkets. You can eat healthily without being a good cook (although you may find you spend more money than if you were to make things from scratch).

Choosing semi-prepared or ready-prepared foods doesn't mean losing weight is impossible. Learn to read food labels and use symbols like the Heart Foundation "tick" to guide you. This symbol helps you to choose items that are better for you because they have been altered to improve the nutritional quality – such as lower fat or lower sodium.



#### Christine King: Sport and health dietitian

NZRD, MSc

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## What really works

Losing weight through severe energy restriction (i.e. crash dieting) causes the loss of lean body mass (muscle) crucial for metabolism. Years of trying diet after diet (yo-yo dieting) will change the composition of your body – so you have less muscle and more fat! This makes weight maintenance more difficult due to changes in your metabolism; the body's efficiency means you need less and less food to survive on. The ultimate aim is to protect or maximize your muscle and minimize your body fat.

Research has described successful weight maintenance as: "the intentional weight loss of at least 10% of the initial body weight and maintaining this for at least one year". 300-500g a week of weight loss may sound slow, but it is a 'sneaky' way to manoeuvre weight loss without you feeling too restricted.

Overall, long term weight loss – and weight loss maintenance – is most successful when people follow several key behaviours:

- Eating a diet low in fat and high in complex carbohydrate
- Eating breakfast
- Regular weight checks with reduction in weight accepted of 300-500g a week
- Moderate intensity physical activity every day (30-60 minutes)

**Ed note:** I have been wearing a pedometer since June, and have discovered it is a motivating way of getting a bit more exercise in my day.

## Healthy Weight Loss: healthy substitutions

Worried about missing your regular favourite meals?

Losing weight doesn't have to mean deprivation; it can be just a few canny substitutions. **Here are Nikki's ideas for healthy alternatives for a week's worth of dinners.**

### MONDAY

Instead of: Cheesy mince nachos

TRY: Homemade hamburgers with wholemeal buns and salad

### TUESDAY

Instead of: Creamy chicken pasta

TRY: Chicken and Vegetable Lasagne served with salad (see HFG issue 7, or [www.healthyfood.co.nz](http://www.healthyfood.co.nz) for the recipe)

### WEDNESDAY

Instead of: Crumbed and panfried beef schnitzel with roast potatoes

TRY: Beef Schnitzel stir-fry with steamed rice

### THURSDAY

Instead of: Sweet and sour chicken with fried rice

TRY: Chicken Tagine with couscous (see HFG issue 3, or [www.healthyfood.co.nz](http://www.healthyfood.co.nz) for the recipe)

### FRIDAY

Instead of: Fish and chips

TRY: Takeaway fish with oven wedges and coleslaw (use lite mayonnaise)

### SATURDAY

Instead of: Pork chops with mashed potato and vegetables

TRY: Ginger and black bean pork with noodles

### SUNDAY

Instead of: Roast leg of lamb with traditional roast vegetables

TRY: Rubbed lamb fillets served with turkish bread and Mediterranean roasted vegetables



For sources of information for this article see page 81 or [www.healthyfood.co.nz](http://www.healthyfood.co.nz)

\* See HFG January for more on "incidental eating" and weight loss.

\* See over for a real-life example of healthy weight loss >

Photos: Dreamstime.com

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# Losing weight the sensible way A REAL LIFE STORY

### KATRINA ROBINSON OF

Christchurch was one of the subjects of Nikki Hart's TV show, *Eat yourself Whole* earlier this year. Nikki says Katrina is one of the most inspiring people she met during the series; having lost over 20 kilos, she's still going with her weight loss and has changed her lifestyle completely. We talked to Katrina about how she did it.

### How much weight have you lost?

I was 165.6kg and now I'm 141.6kg, so that's a total weight loss of 24 kg so far in 10 months.

### What's your goal?

My goal is to be 80kg, but I am realistic about this and realise; it will take a while. I am 36 this month and want to be 80kg by the time I am 40. I am going to do a triathlon in January which in itself is terrifying, but something I really want to achieve.

### How did you get started?

I decided late last year that I had had enough of being overweight and it was time to really do something. This was a conscious decision I made for me, no one else, and I think that is a really major thing. You can't lose weight to please someone else. Then I saw the ad for *Eat Yourself Whole* and the whole thing fell into place from there.



KATRINA BEFORE: 165KG



KATRINA NOW: 141KG  
...AND STILL GOING

### What sort of changes have you made in your life?

My life has changed completely. I no longer binge for days on end. I have stopped buying junk food and takeaways and pies. I may have something naughty now and again, but not like I used to, that type of stuff is not going to help me lose weight.

I walk most days and I belong to a gym. I never thought I would ever enter a gym; it's very intimidating when you are 165kg. Now I think sure, everyone looks at you, but they look at you with admira-

tion, not with what you think they are thinking. Pro fitness here in Christchurch is fantastic. People think it's great that someone like me is going there and are nothing but supportive. I tend to forget that some of them were once overweight.

### How do you find motivation to keep going with the weight loss?

Sometimes it's extremely hard. I am very lucky though, as I have very supportive friends, family and personal trainer. It's a matter of being really honest with

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with yourself and remembering what you want to achieve. When I feel myself becoming unmotivated I look at photos of me at 165kg and also read over the supportive cards that people have given me. This reminds me of what I have achieved and that to succeed I need to keep going. Also I know that I can call up a friend and we can talk things through. It's all about believing in yourself, which sounds corny, but it's true.

### Have there been times when you've felt like giving up? How did you get through them?

There have been loads of times when I've just thought "oh to hell with it," as this process is not easy at all. These are the times when you really just need to get away and focus on the goal at hand. Ask for help from your friends and family. We're all human and sometimes you have to swallow that pride, and say "Hey, I need some help". Doing


something positive like going for a walk or swim will really help. You get motivated again and away you go.

### What advice would you offer others, who are lacking motivation to lose weight?

The motivation is in the doing. Just get out and start doing it. The more you actively start taking positive steps towards losing weight the more motivated you get. The greatest advice I can give is that to lose weight you really need to do it for you. I've spent years trying to please family and friends by losing weight. Because I was doing it for them it never worked. You really need to be completely focused on yourself and your goal. This means sometimes telling people to leave you alone, which is extremely hard to do but is totally necessary. I spent a lot of time facing up to the fact that I put the weight on myself, and I only had myself to blame. It takes a bit of time and courage, but once you face up to it – the world is your oyster.

### Any great tips – little things that have really helped you?

Planning is my best tool. If I don't sit down and plan what I am going to eat it all turns to custard. Planning in advance what you are going to eat for the week means you know each day what you are having so there is no last minute bingeing. Doing the same with exercise is helpful as well.

A really big thing for me has been getting exercise into my life again. I started off really slowly as I was extremely unfit and overweight. Walking just short distances daily until you can get fitter is extremely helpful. Consulting a good dietitian who is not patronising is important. Enlist the support of your family and friends. I know, you've been there before and you think they won't support you because of all the things you have tried in the past. But if you're serious and honest, and you show them you mean business they will support you all the way. Don't forget, they love you and want to see you happy and succeed with your weight loss. If you fall off the wagon (as you will!) allow only one day for self-pity. Don't dwell on it. Get out for a walk and get back on the wagon. 

**To find a dietitian or nutritionist, see our new services directory on page 95.**

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