

# How to Keep Your Diet on Track

Get tips for combating five common weight-loss obstacles

By [Marissa Lippert, RD](#) Posted June 07, 2010 from [Woman's Day July 1 2010](#)

You've been dieting for a few months and have dropped some weight. You're feeling pretty good about your progress and then—bam!—something gets in the way that threatens to land you back where you started. You're not alone: I've counseled countless clients who assume they've mastered the art of [healthy eating](#) and then one day realize the number on the scale is sneaking up on them. When I take a closer look, I see that their problems tend to fit into one of five categories. Here's what to watch out for and how to get back on track in no time.

## Diet Derailer #1: You're Bored

In the beginning, dieting was kind of exciting. Yes, it was hard, but it was also an adventure—you got to think about food in a different way and try new recipes and meal plans. But once you did all that, the excitement probably died down. You figured out which foods fit into your plan, and you stuck with them. Is there anything wrong with oatmeal for breakfast, a turkey sandwich for lunch and grilled chicken for dinner? Absolutely not. But if you eat that almost every day, chances are you won't feel satisfied, which means you may need a larger portion to feel full. Or, just to beat the boredom, you might start reverting to the old high-cal favorites that you "gave up" when you decided to [lose weight](#).

### To Stay on Course...

**Eat seasonally.** This is the best way to keep variety in your diet. Hit a farmers' market (or even your supermarket) with an eye toward the newest produce. Sure, your old standbys (like apples and bananas) are great year-round, but spring asparagus or summer peaches can be much more satisfying.

**Add spice.** The right herbs and spices can take any meal from drab to delicious. Experiment with cilantro (great in a marinade for lean beef), fresh mint (try it in a multigrain pasta salad) and cumin (perfect with salmon). Or go ethnic with easy ingredients like a Moroccan spice blend or Asian chili sauce. For recipe ideas, go to [WomansDay.com/LightRecipes](#).

**Dab on condiments.** A lowfat diet can seem low on flavor, so reintroduce smaller amounts of higher-fat items. Just a tablespoon of pesto, blue cheese, guacamole or roasted red pepper hummus is all you need to punch up a sandwich or main course.

**Try breakfast for dinner and vice versa.** There's nothing that says you can't have a veggie omelet for dinner or a few slices of turkey with some fresh, crunchy veggies for breakfast.

**Experiment.** Test a new recipe that incorporates a type of lean protein you don't eat often, like scallops or ground lamb.

## Diet Derailer #2: You're a Little too Comfortable

You've dropped 5, 10 or even 20 pounds and you're feeling really confident. So confident, in fact, that you start to think nothing can mess with your success. Before you know it, you're again reaching for a second glass of wine or an extra serving of your favorite dish (even if it's a healthy one). You start to treat yourself to dessert once a day instead of once a week. "I can handle it," you tell yourself. "I'll make up for it later!" Meanwhile, those little extras are creeping up, and before you know it, so has the scale.

### To Stay on Course...

**Go back to basics.** It's normal for the scale to fluctuate a bit, but if you see that you're 2 or 3 pounds heavier several weeks in a row, step into action. Review the Get-Real Basics and think about what you were originally doing that you're not anymore. Did you plan your meals for the week ahead of time, but now you're just winging it? Have you stopped keeping a food diary? Go back to the strategies that initially helped you succeed.

**Indulge mindfully.** Whether you're just starting to lose weight or nearing your goal, you deserve to enjoy good food. "There's no reason to feel deprived, hungry or punished," says Michelle May, MD, author of *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat*. The key is to decide what you really want and eat it mindfully, which may mean deciding when a treat is really worth it. You want to finish something delicious and think, "Wow, that was worth every calorie," not, "I feel gross— why did I eat that?"

**Visualize your success.** Keep a picture of you at your fittest on your refrigerator, computer or desk to remind you what you're striving for or hoping to maintain. Or jot on a notecard a list of the pros and cons of resisting or giving in to your urges. "Keeping it handy—like in your wallet—gives you easy access and reminds you why it's worth it to do the hard work," says New York City-based psychologist Andrea Jewell, PsyD.

### Diet Derailer #3: You're Taking a Vacation—and So is Your Diet

There's just something about vacation that makes us all want to indulge. But a week's worth of high-cal meals and snacks can do serious damage. Sometimes the problem is a practical one (say, you're on the road or at an airport with nothing but fast food in sight). But often the biggest roadblock is mental: You're away, you want to enjoy yourself and you don't want to follow any rules—including diet ones.

### To Stay on Course...

**Be realistic.** Aim to [maintain your weight](#) during this time rather than lose. If you can come back from your trip without any extra baggage, consider yourself in good shape.

**Plan ahead.** Pack snacks like nuts and all-natural granola bars so you've got something on hand for difficult situations (a delayed flight, going a long time without meals). Skipping a satisfying snack may lead to overeating at mealtimes. If your best attempts to travel prepared go awry, seek out easy, accessible options like trail mix, fresh fruit, lowfat yogurt, lowfat popcorn or whole-wheat pretzels, most of which you'll find almost anywhere these days.

**Indulge wisely.** Decadent doesn't always mean high-cal. Go ahead and order the lobster (just go easy on the butter sauce) or even the filet mignon (think 4 to 6 ounces, not 16 ounces). And yes, you can eat dessert— but remember that tasty things come in small packages! So if you're going out for ice cream, skip the sundae and get one small scoop of your favorite flavor. And sharing a dessert is always a sweet way to finish a meal.

**Aim for balance.** Pick one meal or snack as a daily splurge; the rest of the time, eat as close to normal as possible.

### Diet Derailer #4: Parties, Parties Everywhere

If your social calendar is constantly full of barbecues, weddings, baby and bridal showers, and more, you're likely faced with multicourse meals, heavy hors d'oeuvres platters, caloric desserts, cocktails...you name it. All that temptation would throw anyone off a healthy weightloss routine.

### To Stay on Course...

**Consider the “specialness” of the event.** Is this the *only* barbecue you’re going to all summer? Then have one hot dog with all the trimmings if that’s what you really want. But if you’ll be barbecuing every weekend, take that into account. Don’t use “But it’s a celebration!” as an excuse to overdo it.

**Don’t hit a party with a growling stomach.** Saving up all day for a big event by skipping meals may set you up to eat more than you bargained for. Keep your metabolism and hunger levels steady by having a small balanced meal or substantial [healthy snack](#) before the party. You’ll be much better equipped to navigate food options and keep tabs on portion sizes if you don’t arrive starving.

**Do a lap.** If you’re at a cocktail party or buffet, don’t dive into the spread immediately. Instead, take some time to scope out what’s available. Save about ¼ of your plate for the fun stuff, like cheese fondue, mini quiche or fried calamari. The rest of your plate is for lighter foods, like fresh crudité’s with a little dip, or mini grilled beef or chicken skewers.

**Think bout what’s negotiable—and what’s not.** If you’re going to a wedding, you’re probably going to have a glass of champagne and a slice of wedding cake. So what’s skippable? That bland roll at your place setting or your side of potatoes, which you could have any day of the week.

### Diet Derailer #5: You’re Stressed

It’s a fact: Food makes us feel good. There’s just something about warm, gooey chocolate chip cookies or creamy chicken pot pie that takes us right back to a place of comfort and calm. That might not be a problem if one cookie did the trick, but for most of us the soothing powers of a food disappear as soon as we stop eating it, says Dr. May. So we end up eating another—and another—in an attempt to recapture that fleeting feeling. And if you’re stressed, you may gobble down food without paying attention to what or how much you’re eating. Research has also found that cortisol, a stress hormone, may prompt you to eat more, especially sweets.

### To Stay on Course...

**Take a breather.** It may sound silly, but the next time you have an impulse to reach for food (but you’re not really hungry), take a deep breath. It will give you a chance to relax and realize that eating will not solve whatever you’re stressed about, says Dr. Jewell. Aside from deep breathing, there are plenty of other non-food things you can do to cope. Try taking a long walk with a friend, reading a book or giving yourself a manicure.

**Try a soothing substitute.** The next time you’re craving a certain food, think about what’s so appealing about its taste and/or texture. If it’s sweetness you desire, how about a mug of hot chocolate made with skim milk? If you want something creamy, would lowfat pudding work as well as a piece of cream pie? If you feel the need to chomp, would crunchy carrots and celery be (nearly) as good as chips?

**Get some rest.** People who are chronically sleep-deprived may feel hungrier and have a yearning for high-carb foods (which are a quick source of energy), says research in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. Aim for 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night.