

The Medifast Transition Plan

When you are ready to stop Medifast, plan to do a gradual transition off the program rather than suddenly jumping back on food. During the transition period, your goal will be to gradually ease back into eating regular food at the same time you slowly wean off the Medifast packets.

Doing a careful transition protects you from experiencing a “rebound” weight gain from suddenly increasing your calorie intake. It also gives your digestive system a chance to adapt to handling regular food again. If you have the option, stretch your transition over a period of three to six weeks so your body can adapt to the changes.

Preparing for transition

On a fasting program, your metabolism drops to conserve available energy. Much like a bear in hibernation, your body learns to survive on fewer calories while it's dependent on using fat stores for energy. When you return to eating, you initially start taking in more food while your metabolism is still low. To counteract this and decrease the risk of regain, you need to give your system time to adjust and rebuild your metabolism.

Gradually increase calories

In the transition plan, you will add food back a little at a time, allowing your body to gradually adapt as you increase your calorie intake. By adding food slowly, you help your metabolism catch up with your intake.

If you've been on Medifast for several months, it can take up to 60 to 90 days for your metabolism to return to normal. During this time you will probably need to follow a meal plan that ranges between 1200 to 1500 calories a day. Eventually your body will rebalance your metabolic rate and you will be able to eat greater amounts of food without gaining weight.

Regular exercise will also boost your metabolism. If possible, plan to exercise daily during your transition period as well as during the first few months after going off your plan. Consistency is more important than intensity as you help your body adjust to the demands of increased food intake.

Ease into digestion

During the time you are on Medifast, your digestive organs don't have to work very hard. Your stomach avoids dealing with wide varieties of food, irritating spices or difficult textures. Most of all, it never gets stuck with having to digest an entire truckload of food at one time.

When you stop Medifast and begin eating regular food again, your system may balk at having to go back to work. Initially you may experience some abdominal discomfort,

including bloating, nausea or diarrhea. You can minimize these problems by making sure you introduce food very gradually.

The transition plan

The transition eating plan is divided into six food sections which you add one at a time. As you advance to each new section, continue to eat the foods from all the previous sections as well. You may divide the foods and amounts as you wish throughout the day. Be sure to take the number of Medifast supplements indicated with each food section.

Plan to do transition over a period of at least two to three weeks, adding a new food section every three or four days. If you wish, you can stretch your transition to six weeks by following each section for an entire week.

If you've occasionally eaten food during your Medifast program and know your stomach can digest it with no problems, you can combine two sections together and do transition a little faster.

If you were on the 5& 1 plan (one meal a day) begin the transition at section three.

The transition sequence

Section 1

(If you were on a complete Medifast plan with no regular food, begin transition here.)

6 Medifast a day
Lean meat 3 to 4 oz.

Begin eating a small serving of meat once a day in addition to your packets. Initially eat only 1 to 2 ounces of meat, then increase up to 4 ounces.

Section 2

6 Medifast a day
Green salad 1-2 cups

Add a green salad to the meat serving. You can add up to 1/4 cup of raw salad vegetables. Use one to two tablespoons of low-fat or reduced-calorie dressing.

Section 3

(If you were on the 5& 1 plan (one meal a day) begin the transition here.)

5 Medifast a day
Add: Vegetables - 1 serving

Continue eating your lean and green meal. Add a 1/2 to 1 cup serving of cooked vegetables.

Section 4

5 Medifast a day
Add: Fruit - 1 serving

In addition to the foods you have been eating in Section 3, add a serving of fruit. This can be a whole fruit such as an apple or peach, or a 1 cup serving of fresh or canned fruit.

Section 5

4 Medifast a day
Add: Dairy products - 1 serving

Continue eating the all the previous foods. Add a dairy serving of 1 cup of low-fat milk or 1/2 cup yogurt or cottage cheese.

Section 6

3 Medifast a day
Add: Grain products - 1 serving

Continue eating the all the previous foods. Add a serving of grain products, such as once slice of bread, a small potato, or 1/2 cup of cereal or pasta.

Moving to a food plan

After you complete the last section of transition, begin following a meal plan of between 1200 to 1500 calories a day. Stay at this level for two to three months in order to allow your metabolism to return to normal.

Secrets to long-term success

Most people who lose weight using Medifast benefit from following a slightly higher protein and lower carbohydrate plan long term. The easiest way to do this is to incorporate Medifast supplements into your daily meals.

The packets provide a strong protein intake as well as maintaining a structure that helps keep you on track with your eating plan. Medifast supplements are a healthy, low-fat protein source that can be used anytime instead of foods such as meat or cheese.

Three a day for life

To help with maintaining your weight, we recommend you continue using two or three Medifast supplements a day as part of your regular meal plan. Build them into your routine by simply replacing one meal and two snacks each day with a Medifast product.

For example, you might have a Medifast oatmeal along with a piece of fruit for breakfast, a Medifast shake mid-morning and a Medifast bar sometime in the afternoon. If you struggle with food cravings in the evening, have a Medifast shake or a Medifast hot cocoa as a low-damage, nurturing snack.

Be careful not to limit your intake too much. If you find you are feeling hungry or tired, you may need to add more food to your plan. On maintenance, when you use Medifast supplements to replace a meal, boost the calorie level by adding at least one other food item, such as a piece of fruit or a salad.

Medifast is a beginning

One of the most common reasons people give for why they regain weight is “I slipped back into my old habits.” You know which patterns get you into trouble—the bags of chips, a few more desserts or a couple extra beers. Stay aware of these potential “trouble spots,” and if they start creeping back into your life, tackle them right away.

The Medifast “blitz”

Anytime you re-gain more five or ten pounds, consider going back on Medifast for a few weeks. Approach it as a short-term treatment plan that puts you back where you want to be.

Also, evaluate your current life issues and see if there are areas where you need to make changes. Have you let your exercise program slip? Are you allowing stress or other emotional issues to affect your eating patterns? Take a careful look at where you might be slipping up and resolve to change those patterns immediately.

Whatever you do, let the Medifast program be a beginning, not an end. Use it as a springboard to a stronger level of learning and healthy living. This is your chance to create a better future. Stay determined to take good care of yourself from now on, including managing your weight.

Parts of this article are excerpted from “Success in a Shaker Jar,” by Linda Spangle, RN, MA.