

Bribe yourself to diet

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(HealthDay)—For many people struggling with weight, an underlying reason for the excess pounds is the habit of using food to soothe bad feelings and reward good behavior. To lose weight, turn that habit on its

ear.

Incentives can help motivate you in many areas, including your diet, but your incentive can't be [food](#). Small, non-food treats or dollars for your piggy bank can sway you to choose less food at meals. It can help with kids, too, and avoid instilling the food-as-[reward](#) habit in them.

University of Southern California researchers tested the theory with experiments involving kids and adults. They found that kids were willing to cut portions in half when offered inexpensive headphones. Adults were eager to eat less if given just *the chance* to win a prize, such as a [gift card](#), frequent flyer miles or a small amount of money. What's more, eating less did not lead participants to compensate by eating more later in the day.

There are many ways you can incentivize yourself, if not at every meal, certainly at ones when you're apt to overeat. Try putting a dollar in a "mad money" jar—that's merely the money you saved by eating less—and then buy yourself a non-food item at the end of every month.

Make a list of the rewards you'd like most and then calculate how many pounds lost and dollars saved it would take to get each one. Reinforce your efforts by making your rewards health- and fitness-related.

Rewards that act as motivation:

- A streaming music service to amp up workouts.
- A new hairstyle to match your new shape.
- A healthy cooking class.
- A spa day, complete with massage.

You can even extend the incentive concept to improve many food-centric lifestyle choices. For instance, go to a movie instead of a fast-

food restaurant and put flowers in your supermarket cart instead of cookies or ice cream.

More information: The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics suggests more [non-food rewards](#) to encourage kids in any activity without using food.

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