This article is another of a series written by the Reading Board of Health intended to provide Reading residents with scientific data on human health and welfare topics. All articles are available at the Reading Board of Health's website.

Maintaining a healthy weight is an extremely important part of overall health. According to the CDC, being overweight can limit the quality and length of life. Health concerns associated with being overweight include high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, type 2 diabetes, depression, sleep apnea, arthritis in bones, and some cancers. Therefore, it is important to ask your healthcare provider what a healthy weight is for you. If you are overweight, keep in mind that severe diets are stressful on the body and mind and difficult to maintain. Speak with your healthcare provider on what type of weight loss program is recommended for you. In general, it is best to lose weight slowly through more mild, long-term lifestyle changes. If you have tried to lose weight in the past, focus on any good habits that stuck and think of ways to avoid traps that were counterproductive.

The following are a few simple habits that will help you get to, and maintain, a healthy weight: 1) Eat off a plate while sitting down. It is easy to lose track of food eaten out of containers while standing. Use a smaller plate to give yourself the illusion of a bigger meal. 2) Eat slowly and drink plenty of water during your meal. This gives you a sense you are being full and, as a result, you will often eat less. Try to eat a meal over 20 or 30 minutes, including putting your fork down between bites. 3) Limit time spent on electronic devices. In a National Weight Control Registry Survey, individuals who watched fewer than 10 hours of TV a week were more successful in maintaining a healthy weight. 4) Eat a healthy breakfast, such as oatmeal, fruit, and foods that contain protein (e.g., yogurt). Research suggests that eating a low sugar breakfast helps to reduce hunger throughout the day. 5) Eat more fruits and vegetables. Try to minimize or remove junk food in your home so you won't be tempted during 'weak' moments.

Along with healthy eating habits and food choices, a healthy weight is maintained with regular physical activity. Reading residents are fortunate to have a large number of local gyms and fitness clubs and classes to choose from. Reading children have athletic opportunities through schools, Reading Recreation, as well as plenty of open play space at playgrounds. If you are a senior, check out the exercise program run through the Pleasant Street Center. Don't overlook the easiest and cheapest exercise available; walking. Scientists at the University of Pittsburgh recently revealed that overweight people who walked briskly for 30 to 60 minutes a day lost weight even if they didn't change any other lifestyle habits. Exercise also maintains and builds muscles. Even when you aren't exercising, muscle burns more calories than fat. This makes exercise a two-for-one special.
If you are overweight, it can be very challenging to lose weight and then maintain a healthy weight. If possible, use a family member or friend to help motivate you to exercise and eat less. Look to them for support when you are struggling. Remember that, while it is hard to lose excess pounds, doing so is extremely rewarding. The CDC website https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/losing_weight/eating_habits.html provides some of the above recommendations, as well as some new ones.