

Losing Weight

Why do I need to lose weight if I am overweight?

Being overweight increases your risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. If you are overweight, losing just 5 to 10% of your weight and keeping it off lowers your risk for developing most of these diseases.

How can I know if I am overweight?

The number you see on the scale doesn't necessarily tell you whether you need to lose weight. That's because 2 people of the same height and weight can have different bone structures. They may carry different amounts of muscle and body fat. For most adults, determining your body mass index (BMI) and waist size are reliable ways to tell whether you are overweight and to estimate your risk for health problems.

The BMI uses your height and weight to estimate how much fat is on your body. A BMI of at least 25 indicates overweight. A BMI of 30 or more indicates you are obese. Generally, the higher your BMI, the higher your health risk.

Your waist size indicates whether you have an apple body shape and tend to carry fat around your midsection. Your health risks increase even further with increasing waist size. A waist measurement greater than 40 inches for men or 35 inches for women indicates a significant increase in health risk, particularly for heart disease and diabetes.

To tell whether your weight is a health risk, you can determine your BMI and health risk with the Body Mass Index chart.

Measure your waist at the point below your ribcage but above your navel. Use your BMI and waist size to determine your risk from the "Calculating Your Risk" table included with the BMI chart.

Note that there are some limits to the usefulness of the BMI score. It may overestimate body fat in athletes and others who have a muscular build. It may underestimate body fat in older persons and others who have lost muscle mass. Your healthcare provider can give you a good sense of whether you have an increased risk of health problems because of your weight. Your provider can also help you find a weight-loss program that works for you.

The BMI chart is not for use in pregnancy. If you are pregnant and want a guide to normal pregnancy weight gain,

ask your healthcare provider for a chart.

What can I do to lose weight?

If you want to lose weight, you can begin with a safe, healthy, well-balanced weight-loss diet. However, the most effective weight management program is not limited to diet. Rather, it involves changes in your lifestyle, including your eating and physical activity habits, which you will be able to continue for the rest of your life.

A plan for weight reduction should include good nutrition, fewer calories, and physical activity. The best sources for information about a safe, healthy, effective weight reduction program are dietitians and healthcare providers.

A good weight loss plan includes:

- a healthy diet
- physical activity
- understanding the emotions behind your eating patterns.

To start your program for losing weight:

- Determine your weight goal.
- Learn how many calories you need each day for a healthy weight.
- Discuss with a dietitian or healthcare provider how to choose healthy and satisfying foods to get those calories.
- Find ways to increase your physical activity. Plan a schedule for getting regular exercise and stick to it.
- Learn how you use food for reasons besides nutrition. For example, do you eat when you are bored or stressed? Do you reward yourself with food? Make changes to prevent these behaviors. For example, allow yourself to eat only at certain places, such as the cafeteria or break room at work and the kitchen or dining table at home. Do not eat meals or snacks in the car or in front of the TV.

What are calories?

A calorie is a measurement of the energy value of food. Your body burns calories for body functions and activities. Food is made up of proteins, carbohydrates, and fats, which contain calories and produce energy. To lose weight, you should reduce the number of calories in your diet without sacrificing good nutrition. You should also use or burn more calories through frequent physical activity.

The average man needs 2500 to 3000 calories a day. The average woman needs 1800 to 2300 calories a day. Most

weight reduction diets suggest 1500 to 1800 calories a day for men and 1200 to 1500 calories a day for women. Eating 500 calories a day less than you need to maintain your weight can result in a loss of 1 pound a week.

The rate at which you can lose weight depends on your body's metabolism. This is the rate at which you use energy, or calories, for basic functions such as eating, sleeping, walking, etc. You may increase your body's rate of metabolism by regularly engaging in physical activity. Weight loss may occur more quickly at the start of a diet because the body releases extra water that was retained.

What are the dietary guidelines for losing weight?

In general, follow these guidelines:

- Write down everything you eat and drink. This lets you see if you are eating a good variety of foods. Also, it allows you to count your daily calories, if you choose.
- Drink plenty of water each day.
- Choose unlimited amounts of vegetables and salads, but take care to add only small amounts of dressings and sauces to these foods.
- Choose:
 - lean meats, poultry, fish, or soy protein
 - baked or broiled meat, fish, or poultry
 - salad dressing containing little or no oil.
- Include the following foods in your diet every day but in appropriate amounts:
 - nonfat dairy products
 - legumes (lentils, peas, and beans)
 - unrefined carbohydrates (whole wheat bread, whole grain cereals without sugar)
 - raw fruits and canned fruits in their own juices, water, or light syrup.
- Limit how much you eat of the following:
 - refined sugar and foods containing high amounts of added sugar (Foods that have a lot of sugar can fit into a weight loss diet if they are viewed as a treat and eaten in small portions less often. Look for 100-calorie/serving snack foods to help you maintain portion and calorie control.)
 - refined grain products such as white rice and white flour (Refined grain products should make up no more than one half of your daily servings of grain. Substitute whole grains for white-flour products whenever you can.)

- Limit:
 - saturated fats such as fats on meat, poultry skin, butter, cheese and other whole-milk products (Look for products that have less than 2 grams of saturated fat per serving.)
 - other foods that contain fats, such as margarine, mayonnaise, pastries, cakes, chips, fried foods, and shortening (View high-fat sweets and snack foods as an occasional treat and try to keep the added fats to no more than a few tablespoons a day.)
 - processed meats because they are often high in fat, salt, and preservatives (Look for low-fat, low-salt products.)
 - alcoholic beverages (Men should have no more than 2 servings a day and women should have no more than 1 serving a day.)
- To have a balanced diet, be sure to choose a variety of foods from the basic food groups:
 - dairy
 - meat and other protein
 - vegetables
 - fruit
 - whole-grain breads, cereal, and pasta
 - healthy fats (olive, canola, and soybean oils and the fat found in nuts, seeds, soybeans, fish, and avocado)
- Sit down and relax while you eat your meals. Avoid distractions such as the phone and TV. Chewing your food thoroughly helps digestion. Eating small, frequent meals instead of 3 full meals is helpful. You should eat every 4 to 5 hours. This keeps your blood sugar at a constant level and helps keep you from feeling hungry. Finish your meals with a piece of fruit instead of a sweet dessert.

What are the physical activity guidelines for losing weight?

Physical activity is as important as diet if you are trying to lose weight and then maintain a healthy weight.

- It helps you lose weight because you burn more calories while you exercise.
- It raises your metabolism for several hours so that you burn more calories after exercise as well.
- It lowers your blood pressure, cholesterol level, and blood sugar level.
- It makes you feel more energetic.
- It improves muscle tone.
- It helps you sleep better.

Don't overdo it at first. Moderate walking for 15 to 30 minutes 3 to 6 times a week is a good start. With your

healthcare provider's approval, your goal should be 30 to 90 minutes of moderate exercise a day, most days of the week. Moderate aerobic exercise is generally defined as requiring the energy it takes to walk 2 miles in 30 minutes. You may need to exercise 60 minutes a day to prevent weight gain and 90 minutes a day to lose weight. Be sure to check with your healthcare provider before starting your exercise program.

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