

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 may not 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 have amounts of muscle and body fat. For most adults, the best way to tell whether you are overweight and to estimate your risk for health problems is to check your body mass index (BMI) and waist size.

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 health risks increase with a bigger waist size. A waist measurement greater than 40 inches for men or 35 inches for women increases your health risk, particularly for heart disease and diabetes.

To tell whether your weight is a health risk, you can check your BMI 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.

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 need a safe, healthy, well-balanced weight-loss diet. However, you also need to change your physical activity habits. Keep track of how many calories you take in, and how many calories you burn each day. You could use a journal or a calorie calculator. After a week, check your totals for each day and average them out. This will give you an idea of your calorie needs.

The best sources for information about a safe, healthy, effective weight loss program are dietitians and healthcare providers.

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 to keep his current weight. 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 keep 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 helps you count your daily calories, if you choose.
- Don't skip meals. It's especially important that you eat a healthy breakfast.
- 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 healthy fats (olive, canola, and soybean oils and the fat found in nuts, seeds, soybeans, fish, and avocado)
- 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 not in large amounts:
 - Nonfat dairy products
 - Lentils, peas, beans, and nuts
 - Whole grain products such as whole wheat bread, whole oats or oatmeal, whole grain cereals without sugar, brown rice, bulgur (cracked wheat), and low-fat popcorn
 - Raw fruit, unsweetened frozen fruit, and canned fruit in its own juice, water, or light syrup

Limit how much you eat of the following:

- Sugar and foods with a lot of added sugar. Foods with sugar can fit into a weight loss diet if they are viewed as a treat and eaten in small portions less often. The American Heart Association recommends that most women should get no more than 100 of their daily calories from added sugar. Most men should get no more than 150 calories from added sugar. Look for snack foods that are 100-calories per serving to help you with 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. Eat products made with whole grains instead of white flour whenever you can.
- Limit:
 - Saturated fats such as the fat in meat, poultry skin, butter, cheese, and other whole-milk products, and trans fats found in stick margarine, shortening, and many snack foods such as crackers, chips, and sweet baked goods. Look for products that have less than 2 grams of saturated fat per serving and 0 grams trans fat per serving.
 - High-fat sweets, snack foods, and fried foods. Enjoy them as an occasional treat. Even when foods contain healthy fats, such as oils, soft margarine and mayonnaise, all fat is high calorie. Try to keep added fats to no more than a few tablespoons a day.
 - Processed foods and 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. Alcoholic drinks have calories without nutrition. They can also make you hungrier.
- 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 large meals per day 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 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.
- It can reduce stress and improve your mood.

Don't overdo it at first. 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 to build up to 5 hours (300 minutes) of moderate exercise a week. (Moderate exercise means you're working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat.) Or you may increase the intensity of exercise and try to get 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of vigorous activity a week. The increased level of exercise will have even more health benefits and improve the chance that you will lose weight and be able to keep a healthy weight.

Also do some form of strength training using gym equipment or your own body weight 2 or more days a week. Strength training will make your muscles stronger and able to work longer without getting tired. Muscle mass burns more calories than fat so as your muscle increases, so does your ability to burn calories.

Be sure to check with your healthcare provider before you start your exercise program.

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Calculating Your Health Risk Using Your Body Mass Index

1. Find your body mass index (BMI) on the chart below. Your body mass index uses your height and weight to estimate how much fat is on your body. Find your height on the left. Then find your weight on the row at the top. Your BMI is the number on the chart at the intersection between your height and weight.

Weight	105	110	115	120	125	130	135	140	145	150	155	160	165	170	175	180	185	190	195	200	205	210	215
Height																							
5'0"	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42
5'1"	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	
5'2"	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39		
5'3"	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38		
5'4"	18	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37		
5'5"	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37		
5'6"	17	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36		
5'7"	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36		
5'8"	16	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35		
5'9"	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35		
5'10"	15	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34		
5'11"	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34		
6'0"	14	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33		
6'1"	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33		
6'2"	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33		
6'3"	13	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32		
6'4"	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32		

2. Measure your waist size.
3. Use your BMI and waist size to determine your health risk on the chart below.

BMI		Waist size	
		35 inches or less (women) 40 inches or less (men)	More than 35 inches (women) More than 40 inches (men)
<18	Underweight		
18.5 to 24.9	Healthy Weight		
25 to 29.9	Overweight	Increased risk	High risk
30 to 34.9	Obese	High risk	Very high risk
35 to 39.9	Obese	Very high risk	Very high risk
40 or more	Extremely Obese	Extremely high risk	Extremely high risk

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