

Facts About Healthy Weight



Why Is a Healthy Weight Important?

Being overweight or obese increases your risk for many diseases and conditions. The more you weigh, the more likely you are to suffer from heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, gallbladder disease, sleep apnea, and certain cancers. On the other hand, a healthy weight has many benefits: It helps you to lower your risk for developing these problems, helps you to feel good about yourself, and gives you more energy to enjoy life.

What Is Your Risk for Weight-Related Diseases?

Body Mass Index (BMI)

Your BMI accurately estimates your total body fat. And, the amount of fat that you carry is a good indicator of your risk for a variety of diseases.

There are two ways to check your BMI:

- Use the BMI chart on page 3. First, find your height in the left-hand column. Then, follow it over until you find your weight. The number on the top of that column is your BMI.
- Use the BMI calculator on the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's (NHLBI's) Web site: <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>

Once you know your BMI, check Box 1 to see what the number means. Although BMI can be used for most men and women, it does have some limitations:

- 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.

Waist Circumference Measurement

Your waist circumference is also an important measurement to help you figure out your overall health risks. If most of your fat is around your waist, then you are more at risk for heart disease and diabetes. This risk increases with a waist measurement that is:

- Greater than 35 inches for women
- Greater than 40 inches for men

Other Risk Factors for Heart Disease

If you have other risk factors for heart disease (shown in Box 2) and are overweight or obese, then you will be at greater risk for health problems. Your doctor will check your BMI, waist circumference, and other risk factors for heart disease:

- If you are overweight (BMI 25–29.9), do not have a high waist circumference, and have less than two risk factors, then it's important that *you not gain* any more weight.
- If you are overweight (BMI 25–29.9) or have a high waist circumference and have two or more risk factors, then it is important for *you to lose* weight.
- If you are obese (BMI \geq 30), then it is important for *you to lose* weight.

Even a small weight loss (just 5–10 percent of your current weight) will help to lower your risk of developing weight-related diseases.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

National Institutes of Health
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Box 1—What Does Your BMI Mean?

Normal weight: BMI = 18.5–24.9

Good for you! Try not to gain weight.

Overweight: BMI = 25–29.9

Do not gain any weight, especially if your waist circumference is high. You need to lose weight if you have two or more risk factors for heart disease and are overweight or have a high waist circumference.

Obese: BMI = 30 or greater

You need to lose weight. Lose weight slowly—about 1/2 to 2 pounds a week. See your doctor or a nutritionist if you need help.

Box 2—Risk Factors

Besides being overweight or obese, here are other risk factors to consider:

- Cigarette smoking
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- High LDL cholesterol (bad cholesterol)
- Low HDL cholesterol (good cholesterol)
- High triglycerides
- High blood glucose (sugar)
- Family history of premature heart disease
- Physical inactivity



How To Lose Weight and Maintain It

Changing the way you approach weight loss can help you be more successful at losing it. Most people who try to lose weight focus on one thing: weight loss. However if you set goals, begin to eat healthy foods, become more physically active, and learn how to change behaviors, then you may be more successful at losing weight. Over time, these changes will become routine and part of your everyday life.

Weight Loss Goals

Setting the right goals is an important first step to losing and maintaining weight.

- Losing just 5–10 percent of your current weight over 6 months will lower your risk for heart disease and other conditions.
- Losing 1–2 pounds per week is a reasonable and safe weight loss. Losing weight at this rate will help you to keep off the weight. And it will give you the time to make new healthy lifestyle changes.
- Maintaining a modest weight loss over a longer period of time is better than losing a lot of weight and regaining it. You can think about additional weight loss after you've lost 10 percent of your current body weight and have kept it off for 6 months.

Keeping a Balance

Maintaining a healthy weight calls for keeping a balance . . . a balance of energy. You must balance the calories or energy that you get from food and beverages with the calories that you use to keep your body going and to be physically active.

- The same amount of energy IN and OUT over time = weight stays the same
- More energy IN than OUT over time = weight gain
- More energy OUT than IN over time = weight loss

Your energy IN and OUT doesn't have to balance exactly every day: Balancing energy over time will help you to maintain a healthy weight in the long run.

A Healthy Eating Plan

A healthy eating plan gives your body the nutrients it needs every day and helps you to stay within your daily calorie level. This eating plan will also lower your risk for heart disease and such other conditions as high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol levels.

A healthy eating plan:

- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts
- Is low in saturated fats, *trans* fat, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars
- Controls portion sizes

Calories

Cutting back on calories is part of a healthy eating plan to lose weight. Choose foods that are lower in fats, especially saturated and *trans* fats, cholesterol, and added sugars. Also, pay attention to portion sizes.

To lose 1–2 pounds a week, daily intake should be reduced by 500 to 1,000 calories. In general:

- Eating plans that contain 1,000–1,200 calories each day will help most women to lose weight safely.
- Eating plans that contain 1,200–1,600 calories each day are suitable for men and may also be appropriate for women who weigh 165 pounds or more or who exercise regularly.

If you eat 1,600 calories a day but do not lose weight, then you may want to cut back to 1,200 calories. If you are hungry on either diet, then you may want to boost your calories by 100 to 200 per day. Very low calorie

Height

Body Mass Index											
	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
4'10"	100	105	110	115	119	124	129	134	138	143	148
5'0"	107	112	118	123	128	133	138	143	148	153	158
5'1"	111	116	122	127	132	137	143	148	153	158	164
5'3"	118	124	130	135	141	146	152	158	163	169	175
5'5"	126	132	138	144	150	156	162	168	174	180	186
5'7"	134	140	146	153	159	166	172	178	185	191	198
5'9"	142	149	155	162	169	176	182	189	196	203	209
6'0"	150	157	165	172	179	186	193	200	208	215	222
6'1"	159	166	174	182	189	197	204	212	219	227	235
6'3"	168	176	184	192	200	208	216	224	232	240	248

* Weight is measured with underwear but no shoes.

diets of less than 800 calories per day should not be used unless you are being monitored by your doctor.

Physical Activity

Staying physically active and eating fewer calories will help you lose weight and keep the weight off over time. Plus, physical activity has many benefits:

- Lowers the risk of heart disease; diabetes; and such cancers as breast, uterus, and colon
- Strengthens your lungs and helps them to work more efficiently
- Strengthens your muscles and keeps your joints in good condition
- May slow bone loss
- Gives you more energy
- Helps you to relax and cope better with stress
- Builds confidence
- Allows you to fall asleep more quickly and sleep more soundly
- Provides an enjoyable way to share time with friends and family

How much physical activity should you aim for?

- For overall health and to reduce the risk of disease, aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week.

- To help manage body weight and prevent gradual weight gain, aim for 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity most days of the week.
- To maintain weight loss, aim for at least 60–90 minutes of daily moderate physical activity.

You can break up the amount of time that you do physical activity, such as 15 minutes at a time. If you haven't been physically active for some time, then don't let that stop you. Start slowly and gradually increase your activity. For example, start walking for 10–15 minutes three times a week, then gradually build up to the recommended amount with brisk walking.

Other Weight Loss Options

Weight loss drugs and weight loss surgery may be options for some people who are at high risk from overweight or obesity or who have been unsuccessful at making lifestyle changes. If you think that you may benefit from weight loss drugs or surgery, then talk to your doctor.

Tips to Weight Loss Success

Maintaining long-term weight loss can be difficult. Three keys to success are setting realistic goals, following a healthy diet, and aiming for 60–90 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

Portion Distortion: How To Choose Sensible Servings

It's very easy to "eat with your eyes" and misjudge what equals a serving—piling on unwanted pounds. This is especially true when you eat out, because restaurant portions are often super sized and enough for two or more people to share.

To keep portion sizes sensible:

- When eating out, choose small portions, share an entrée with a friend, or take some of the food home.
- Check a product's Nutrition Facts label to learn how much food is considered a serving and how many calories, fat grams, and other nutrients are in the item.
- Limit portion sizes of such high-calorie foods as cookies, cakes, and other sweets; french fries; and oils.
- Use smaller plates. We eat most of what is on our plate, no matter what the size. Smaller plates can mean smaller portions.



Other tips for weight loss success:

- Set specific, realistic goals that are forgiving (less than perfect). To start, try walking 30 minutes, 3 days a week.
- Ask for encouragement from your health care provider(s) via telephone or e-mail; friends and family can help. You can also join a support group.
- Keep a record of your food intake and the amount of physical activity that you do. This is an easy way to track how you are doing. A record can also inspire you. For example, when it shows that you've been more active, you'll be encouraged to keep it up.
- Change your surroundings to avoid overeating. For example, don't eat while watching television. Plan to meet a friend in a nonfood setting.
- Reward your success but not with food. Instead, choose rewards that you'll enjoy, such as a movie, music CD, an afternoon off from work, a massage, or personal time.

You can feel healthier by doing any of the following activities. For added fun, ask friends or family to join you.

- Walk or ride a bike in your neighborhood.
- Join a walking club at a mall or at work.
- Play golf at a local club.
- Join a dance or yoga class.
- Work in your garden.
- Use local athletic facilities.
- Join a hiking or biking club.
- Join a softball team or play other sports with coworkers, friends, and family.

To Learn More

Contact NHLBI for information on weight management and heart health:

NHLBI Health Information Center

P.O. Box 30105
Bethesda, MD 20824-0105
Phone: 301-592-8573
TTY: 240-629-3255
Fax: 301-592-8563

Also, check out these Web sites and Web pages:

NHLBI:
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

Includes publications and interactive features on overweight and obesity, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, heart attack, asthma, and women's heart health

Aim for a Healthy Weight:
<http://healthyweight.nhlbi.nih.gov>

Includes publications and such interactive features as a Portion Distortion quiz and BMI calculator

We Can!—Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition:
<http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov>

Includes materials for parents to help prevent overweight and obesity in their children

Heart Healthy Recipes:

- <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/syah/index.htm>
- http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/ktb_recipebk/
- http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/chol/hbc_what.htm



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

National Institutes of Health
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

NIH Publication No. 06-5830
June 2006

