Managing Your Weight

The number of people in the United States who are overweight or obese is increasing at an alarming rate. Most health experts consider this to be such a serious health problem that they are calling it an epidemic. Staying within your recommended weight range is one of the most important things you can do for your overall health and well-being.

It's good for you. Take a look at some of the benefits you can get by reaching and maintaining a body weight that's right for you.

- Reduce your risk for heart disease, stroke, cancer, obesity, depression, and diabetes
- Increase your chances of living a longer and more independent life
- Reduce stress on your joints
- Manage chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, back pain, arthritis, and high blood pressure.
- Improve your sleep
- Boost your energy level

How did this happen? In some cases, obesity can be traced to heredity. But in most cases, the cause of excess body weight is eating more calories (food and drink) than we burn (exercise and activity).

Getting it right. Weight loss usually is just a diet, while weight management is a permanent change in your lifestyle. Your new behaviors will not end once you've reached your goal; instead, they will become part of the way you live your life every day.

- Think inches. Even if you're not losing pounds as fast as you thought you would, you may be losing inches. Check your progress with a tape measure as well as a scale.
- Lose gradually. Experts agree that losing no more than 1 to 2 pounds per week is safer and more effective than crash dieting.
BE ACTIVE * EAT WELL

Dining Out
The Best Selections

Walking calories away
Physical activity helps increase muscle, which improves your fuel-burning capacity. Regular physical activity, such as walking, will help you meet your goals. It is inexpensive, requires little equipment, and can be done almost anywhere.

• **Talk with your doctor** before starting any exercise program, especially if you have been inactive, are over 40, or have a chronic health problem.

• **Walk at least 5 days a week** for a total of 45 to 60 minutes per session, and consume fewer calories. This combination usually will produce significant weight loss.

• **Wear proper footwear.** For most people, properly fitted walking or jogging shoes offer enough support and cushioning.

• **Wear a pedometer** to count the total number of steps you take each day. For successful weight loss, try to accumulate 10,000 steps per day.

• **Walk at a comfortable level of intensity.** If you can carry on a normal conversation without being out of breath, you’ll know you’re not overdoing it.

Mindful eating
Keep a diary of when and what you eat, who’s with you, and your mood. This will help you identify your eating patterns and triggers, and keep track of your intake. By making changes, you’ll soon be eating just the number of calories you need to control your weight. Here are a few simple changes you can make:

• **Reduce your daily calories** by replacing high-fat foods and snacks with lower-fat choices.

• **Eat smaller portions** and eat more often. Instead of three large meals, eat five to seven smaller ones. Your body will use calories more efficiently.

• **Use smaller plates** so you’ll take smaller portions. Skip the seconds.

• **Relax and enjoy your meal.** Chew slowly and put down utensils between bites. It takes your stomach 20 minutes to get the message to your brain that it’s no longer hungry.

• **Savor silence.** TV, radio, and even reading can distract you from noticing how much you’re eating.

Choosing food that is in sync with your weight loss efforts can be challenging when you’re eating meals away from home. Here are some reminders:

**Social events.** Avoid fatty chips and dips and look for veggie trays instead. Alcoholic beverages also add unwanted calories.

**Fast food.** Look past high-fat, high-calorie burgers and fries – try low-fat salads, tortilla-wrapped sandwiches, or grilled chicken. Order water, unsweetened fruit juice or tea, or low-fat milk instead of high-calorie soft drinks. Ask to see the restaurant’s nutritional guidelines.

**Restaurants.** Try broiled, baked, roasted, or steamed selections. Avoid fried food or those served with heavy sauces. Request that salad dressing be served on the side. Ask to substitute steamed vegetables for a baked potato. When you have a choice, order the small size or appetizer portion. Share a full meal with your dining partner or order half portions. Recognize the risk in all-you-can-eat offers – it’s a pretty sure bet that you’ll overeat.

**Salad bar.** Choose fresh romaine lettuce and spinach for a nutritious base. Select raw vegetables such as broccoli, carrots, tomatoes, peppers, cauliflower, mushrooms and onions. Avoid salads prepared with high-fat dressings and mayonnaise (e.g., potato, tuna, egg, pasta salads). Opt for fat-free dressings, lemon juice, or vinegar and heart-healthy olive oil. Bypass toppings such as cheddar cheese, bacon bits and croutons.

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Seconds? No thanks!

One of the biggest obstacles to managing your weight may not be what you eat, but how much you eat. Although it may seem cheaper to buy food in value-sized packaging or special meal deals, keeping those extra pennies in your pocket may have you paying in other ways with extra pounds around your waistline. For example, did you know that there are as many as 800 calories in a 64-ounce soft drink? It’s important to understand that a serving is the amount recommended; while a portion is the amount you choose to eat at any one time, which may be more or less than a serving. If you’re having trouble managing your weight, it could be that you are simply eating more than the recommended serving, and therefore, adding too many calories to burn off with activity. Here are some strategies for keeping portion sizes in check.

When eating away from home:
- When you have a choice of portion sizes, order small.
- Share a full meal with your dining partner or order half-portions.
- Eat half, then ask for a bag or box and take home the rest.
- Recognize the risk in “all-you-can-eat” offers – it’s a pretty sure bet you’ll overeat.
- Resist creamy salads and dressings at the salad bar, which can add an extra 100 calories per tablespoon.

When eating at home:
- Prepare just enough food for one meal.
- Trade large dinner plates for smaller salad plates.
- Serve food on plates rather than serving family style from bowls at the table.
- Say, “No thanks,” to seconds. Clear food from the table or leave the table, if necessary.
- Read food labels carefully. A serving is usually a lot smaller than you think and not necessarily the entire package. For instance, one serving of pasta is ½ cup and the jumbo-sized bagels served in coffee shops can equal up to five times the recommended serving size for grains.

Shopping on the Edge

When you shop for food, you want to select the most nutritious food your hard earned money can buy. Start with a list to avoid impulse buying, and try to avoid shopping when you are hungry. Most grocery stores are set up so that the inside aisles primarily have processed food, snacks, soft drinks, canned items and other packaged food. However, around the outside walls, you’ll find fresh vegetables, fruit, cheese, eggs, milk, meat and fruit juice – some of the most nutritious foods you can buy. Stick to the periphery of your store and fill your cart with your health and well-being in mind.

Diet Sabotage at Work

Eating well at work can be a real challenge. Birthday cakes, candy jars, bending-machine food, and donuts are just some of the diet pitfalls you may face. Here’s how you can avoid these nutritional obstacles and still get your co-workers’ support:

- **Plan for snack breaks.** Be prepared when hunger strikes with a supply of fresh fruit, popcorn (no butter, no salt) and low-fat yogurt.
- **Help choose meeting munchies.** Discuss healthy choices with the person who orders for company functions. If it’s a breakfast meeting, suggest yogurt and fruit instead of donuts and pastries.
- **Control your hunger.** Eating a good breakfast and bringing a healthy lunch can limit snacking.
- **Choose vending machine foods wisely.** Good low-fat choices include pretzels, dried fruit and hard candy.
Reality Check

Are You Apple-Shaped? Recent studies are giving us another way to tell if being overweight is increasing our risks for cardiovascular disease and diabetes. While BMI takes into account height and weight, it does not tell us anything about where the extra weight is carried on the body or how muscular a person is. Researchers have found that, regardless of your BMI, your risk of cardiovascular disease is higher if you carry your weight around your waist, as opposed to having fat concentrated on the hips and thighs. Belly fat, when out of proportion with total body fat, is now considered a significant health risk.

Measuring your hip-to-waist ratio:

- **Waist:** Measure your waist below your rib-cage but above your belly button.
- **Hips:** Measure your widest part of your hips.
- **Divide:** Your waist measurement by your hip measurement.

A ratio of .90 or less is considered safe for men. For women, a ratio of .80 or less is considered safe.

If your hip-to-waist ratio is higher than it should be, consider:

- losing weight and exercising to reduce your belly fat; or
- exercising to increase muscle mass, which will increase your hip size.

Tough Questions

If your current body weight is within or below the “Healthy Weight” range on the BMI scale (see below), but you still want to lose weight, step back and think carefully about your reasons.

Are you trying to meet someone else’s expectation of your ideal weight? Are you trying to lose weight for a specific one-time event such as a wedding or reunion? Are you influenced by media images of ultra-thin celebrities? Are you dissatisfied with the natural shape you inherited from your ancestors, even though your weight is normal? Are these sound reasons for losing weight? Always consult your doctor for guidance before adopting a weight-loss plan.

Body Mass Index (BMI)

BMI shows how body weight relates to height. A high BMI usually means extra body fat, although some people who have a lot of muscle may have a high BMI without having higher health risks.

Use the chart to the right to find your BMI. Draw a line from left to right from your height. Next, draw a line up from your weight to the top of the chart. Your category is in the range where the two lines cross.

Your risk of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, gallbladder disease, certain cancers, sleep apnea, respiratory problems, stroke and coronary artery disease is a lot higher if:

- Your waist measures more than 40 inches around (for men) or 35 inches (for women).