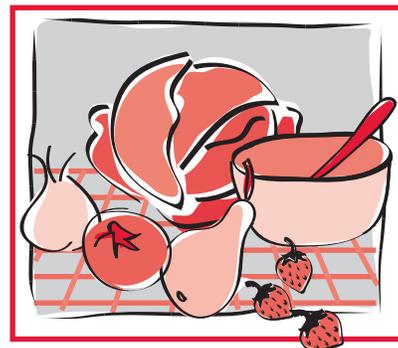


# Weight Management: It's All About You

Fact Sheet No. 9.368

Food and Nutrition Series | Health



by J. Anderson and L. Young\*

Weight is a major concern for many Americans, with good reason:

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 65 percent of American adults are overweight or obese.
- Americans spend over \$33 billion each year on weight control products, which seem to have no effect on weight loss.
- Most people who lose weight in traditional weight loss programs regain all of the lost weight within three to five years.
- Only 20 percent of all Americans get enough exercise to improve health and maintain healthy weights.

As Americans become increasingly overweight, scientists are finding more and more links between obesity and health.

## Give It to Me Straight!

What determines if you are overweight or obese? One of the gold standards is the Body Mass Index or BMI. To determine BMI, divide your weight in kilograms by your height in meters, squared. This calculation standardizes weight based on height. See Table 1 for converting your height and weight to metric.

The federal guidelines on overweight and obesity classify overweight as a BMI of 25 and above and obese as a BMI of 30 and above. (See Table 2.) These guidelines were developed because of the potential severity of excess weight on overall health.

Higher body weight substantially increases your risk of death from high blood pressure; diabetes; coronary heart disease; stroke; gallbladder disease; osteoarthritis; sleep apnea and respiratory problems; and endometrial, breast, prostate and colon cancers.

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## Do I Have to Lose Weight?

Just because you may be considered overweight does not mean that weight loss is mandatory. Weight loss is suggested only for individuals with a BMI in the 25 to 29 range who have two other weight-related risk factors for illness or for individuals who are considered obese. Weight-related risk factors include hypertension, high total cholesterol and a family history of obesity-related disease. Overweight individuals with high

**Table 1. Calculating BMI.**

Metric conversions:	
Pounds to kilograms:	1 lb = 0.45 kg
Inches to meters:	1 in = 0.0254 m
Formula:	
Wgt in kg / Ht in m <sup>2</sup>	
Sample calculation for an individual 5'6" tall and 175 lbs:	
5'6" = 66" x 0.0254 = 1.68 m	
1.68 <sup>2</sup> = 2.82m <sup>2</sup>	
175 lb x 0.45 = 78.75 kg	
78.75 kg / 2.82m <sup>2</sup> = 27.9 BMI	

**Table 2. Overweight and obese BMI cutoff points for various heights.**

Height (inches)	BMI of 25 overweight (pounds)	BMI of 30 obese (pounds)
58	119	143
59	124	148
60	128	153
61	132	158
62	136	164
63	141	169
64	145	174
65	150	180
66	155	186
67	159	191
68	164	197
69	169	203
70	174	207
71	179	215
72	184	221
73	189	227
74	194	233
75	200	240
76	205	246

Source: National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, National Institutes of Health, 1998.

## Quick Facts

- Healthy eating and regular physical activity are the keys to good health.
- Good health makes you more confident, energetic and productive.
- Manage your eating patterns by enjoying a wide variety of great-tasting foods.
- Use the Food Guide Pyramid as the basis for your healthy eating plan.

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waist circumferences also are encouraged to lose weight.

Where your fat is distributed (represented by your waist circumference) plays an important role in determining whether your weight is healthy. Pear-shaped bodies have more fat in the hips and thighs, while apple-shaped bodies store it in the upper body and abdomen. Research shows that people with apple-shaped bodies are more at risk for health problems. To determine if you are at risk, measure your waist circumference. You are at disease risk if your waist circumference is greater than 35 inches for women and 40 inches for men.

In all cases, weight management means adopting a lifestyle that includes a healthy eating plan and regular physical activity — both key to a healthy, productive, energetic life. This, in turn, can lead to increased self-esteem, satisfaction and happiness with your life, both at work and at play.

Your healthy weight depends on many things, including genes, physical activity, age and the foods you eat. It is different from anyone else's, even someone who may be the same height.

Accepting limitations of your body and body size will help you set realistic goals.

## What's in It for Me?

If you and your doctor believe your weight is an issue, even small, sustained weight changes can improve health status by lowering the risks for weight-related diseases. Healthy, prolonged weight reduction can result in decreased blood pressure. For diabetics, it can decrease the need for insulin. Improving your eating habits even slightly can help you maintain a healthy weight.

## Develop an Eating Plan

This does not mean dieting, but rather managing your lifestyle with the foods you eat. Nor does it mean giving up the great-tasting foods that you love. It does mean developing a sensible, balanced eating plan and committing to making behavior changes.

Use [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) or fact sheet 9.353, *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* as your basis for meal and snack planning. The pyramid shows a diet high in complex carbohydrates and fiber, such as whole

grains; high in fruits and vegetables; and low in fat. Watch for foods high in fat. They may contribute to excess calories and weight gain. Include lean meats or meat substitutes and low-fat dairy products rich in calcium. Planning meals and snacks that include plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains may help replace higher-fat foods.

The [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) also provides suggested serving sizes. Portion sizes are important for healthy eating. Large servings of even low-fat foods can be high in calories.

## Add Activity to Your Life

Regular physical activity is important to good health. Combined with healthy eating, it is a great way to regulate weight because it can help you feel more energetic. It also can reduce your percentage of body fat, which can lower your risk for heart disease even if you are overweight. Physical activity helps improve stress levels, too. Unfortunately, only 20 percent of Americans get enough exercise to improve health and maintain healthy weights.

Any activity that gets you moving helps you on the way to a healthier lifestyle. Doing 30 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity activity most days of the week is recommended for prevention of chronic disease. This activity is above usual activity at work or home. Try walking briskly, gardening, hiking, or bicycling for moderate activity. Increasing this activity to 60 minutes a day is recommended for preventing weight gain and 60 to 90 minutes for losing weight. Start slowly and gradually build up to the 30, 60 or 90 minutes of physical activity each day. You may choose to do your activity in 10 or 20 minute segments. Try combining various activities to reach your goal for the day.

Choose activities you enjoy doing. Physical activity can and should be fun! (See Table 3 for some ideas.) Even simple things, such as parking your car in the furthest spot from the store or taking the stairs instead of the elevator, are steps to a more active lifestyle. Consider purchasing an inexpensive pedometer to discover your baseline for everyday physical activity which is different than physical exercise. Everyday physical activity encompasses everyday tasks like walking, household chores, etc.

## Set Goals

The key to managing good health and maintaining a healthy weight throughout your life begins with a positive attitude and realistic goals. Set small, step-by-step goals. When you achieve one, celebrate your success but avoid food as a reward.

Rather than focusing on a certain target weight, increase your chances for success by focusing on improved health through healthy eating and increased activity. Set other goals, too, such as improving your cholesterol levels. Cholesterol can be assessed through simple blood tests.

Motivators, such as improved health and increased energy, self-esteem and self-control, will help you manage your healthy lifestyle.

## Enlist Support

Everyone can adopt a healthy lifestyle. Let your friends and family know what you are doing, and ask for their support. Long-term success is more likely with supportive family and friends. They can encourage healthy eating and regular exercise. They may even join you!

## Be Realistic

Set goals to make small, achievable changes over time. Give yourself a reward when you meet your goals. As you reach your goals, add new, ones that focus on changing negative behaviors. Realize that all your goals will not be met overnight. Here are some easy things that you can do in your diet:

- Choose lean meat and try grilling, broiling or sautéing in broth or other low-fat sauce.

**Table 3. Examples of moderate physical activities for healthy U.S. adults.**

- Walking briskly (3-4 miles per hour)
- Conditioning or general calisthenics
- Home care, general cleaning
- Racket sports, such as table tennis
- Mowing lawn, power mower
- Golf – pulling cart or carrying clubs
- Home repair, painting
- Fishing, standing or casting
- Jogging
- Swimming (moderate effort)
- Cycling, moderate speed (10 miles per hour or less)
- Gardening
- Canoeing leisurely (2-4 miles per hour)
- Dancing

Source: Adapted from Pate, et al. (1995). *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 273, 404.

## Choose a Lifestyle

Good health and weight management include a life-long commitment to a healthy lifestyle.

Remember, the best way to achieve a healthy weight is to eat a healthy diet that is low in fat, includes all food groups, and has plenty of whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

Enjoy at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day to achieve or maintain good health.

Follow these simple guidelines to put you on the road to a healthy lifestyle and a healthier you!

- For lower-fat meat, put cooked lean ground beef in a strainer and rinse briefly with hot water. Drain well and continue with your recipe.
- Have a meatless meal occasionally.
- For a refreshing treat and a calcium boost, snack on fruit-flavored, fat-free yogurt.
- Shopping on the run? Choose products that say “low” or “reduced” fat on the label. These terms are easy to see and mean what they say. Be sure and double check the calorie content, too, because low-fat doesn’t always mean low-calorie. Often when food manufacturers remove fat, they add in extra sugars.
- Check the vending machine for lower-fat, lower-calorie goodies like pretzels, bagels, low-fat yogurt, fresh fruit, skim milk and juice.

### Be Adventurous

Don’t be afraid to try new foods. One may turn out to be your favorite!

- Try a fruit or vegetable you haven’t had before. Make this a monthly goal.
- Enjoy a meal at a Thai, Indian, Japanese or other ethnic restaurant.
- Prepare one new recipe each month from a favorite magazine or newspaper article.
- Each time you shop, pick up a food you don’t normally buy.
- Try to eat the number of servings in each food group in the Food Guide Pyramid.
- Modify your favorite recipes to lower their fat or sugar or to increase their fiber.

### Be Flexible

Balance what you eat with the physical activity you do over several days. Don’t worry about just one meal or one day. It’s all about being balanced.

- Eat a lighter breakfast and lunch to allow for “pizza with the works” for dinner.
- Don’t track every food you eat. But for foods you eat often, check the percent daily value column (% DV) on food labels and balance high-fat food choices with low-fat ones.
- Don’t pack on extra pounds during your vacation. Plan ahead to walk, bike, hike or play volleyball to balance out special vacation meals.
- If you don’t want to give up whole milk, balance it out with lower-fat food choices you like.
- Enjoy a short walk with a friend before dinner.
- Allow yourself to indulge sometimes. Just think “balance.”

### Be Sensible

Enjoy all foods, just don’t overdo it. You can enjoy a balanced menu with many great-tasting foods – in the correct amounts.

- Eat mindfully. This means using all of your sense when you eat. Look at your food and notice colors and textures, smell the food and aromas, notice the texture in your mouth, finally, taste and notice complex flavors. This process of eating requires more time so you will feel full longer and helps you to appreciate your food.
- Slow down! It takes 20 minutes for your brain to send the signal that you’ve had enough to eat. Aim to eat until you are 70 percent full and stop. If you are hungry again in 20 minutes eat a bit more. This will take practice but if you preserve it will be worth it.
- Enjoy your steak twice as much. Eat half in the restaurant and take the rest home to enjoy the next day.
- Have one helping and savor every bite.
- Wait a few minutes after finishing your helping to decide if you really need another one.
- Make your ice cream cone a single dip, not a double.
- Add calcium to your daily diet the food label way – “20% DV” listed on the label means that food is an excellent source.

- Serve your snacks on a plate to control the amount you eat, rather than eating straight out of the bag.

### Be Active

Walk the dog; don’t just watch the dog walk. Get out there and have some fun!

- Set your goal at 30 minutes of moderate activity most days. In 10-minute increments, it’s easy.
- Take a brisk 10-minute walk, or walk the stairs up and down, on your lunch break. You’ll feel good and have more energy, too!
- Hop off the bus a few blocks early and walk briskly the rest of the way.
- Keep active around the house: sweep the garage, scrub the floors, vacuum the rugs or trim the shrubs. It all helps you get fit, and the house will look great, too!
- Try a fun new activity! How about ballroom dancing, roller-blading, ice skating or line-dancing?
- Get energized! Take a brisk 10-minute walk in the morning, at lunch and after dinner to total 30 minutes a day.
- Climb the stairs instead of riding the elevator. You’ll be more fit without adding additional time to your fitness routine.

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