



Setting goals for weight loss

There are lots of reasons for people who are overweight or obese to lose weight. These include being healthier overall, looking better, feeling better and having more energy. No matter what the reason, successful weight loss and healthy weight management depend on sensible goals and expectations. If you set sensible goals for yourself, chances are you'll be more likely to meet them and have a better chance of keeping the weight off.

People who set a goal of losing even five to 10 percent is the kind of goal that can help improve overall health.

Most overweight people should lose weight gradually. For safe and healthy weight loss, try not to exceed a rate of two pounds per week. Sometimes, people with serious health problems associated with obesity may have legitimate reasons for losing weight rapidly. If so, a physician's supervision is required.

Your weight is the result of several factors:

- How much and what kinds of food you eat
- Whether your lifestyle includes regular physical activity
- Whether you use food to respond to stress and other situations in your life
- Your physiologic and genetic make-up

- Your age and health status

Successful weight loss and weight management should address all of these factors. And that's the reason to ignore products and programs that promise quick and easy results, or that promise permanent results without permanent changes in your lifestyle. Any ad that says you can lose weight without lowering the calories you take in and/or increasing your physical activity is selling fantasy and false hope. In fact, some people would call it fraud. Furthermore, the use of some products may not be safe.

A realistic approach is healthier

Many people who are overweight or obese have decided not to diet per se, but to concentrate on engaging in regular physical activity and maintaining healthy eating habits in accordance with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, emphasizing lowered fat consumption, and an increase in vegetables, fruits and whole grains. Others who try to diet usually report needing help to achieve their weight management goals.

Fad diets that ignore the principles of the Dietary Guidelines may result in short-term weight loss, but may do so at the risk of your health. How you go about managing your weight has a lot to do with your long-term success. Unless your health is seriously at risk due to complications from being overweight or obese, gradual weight loss should be your rule—and your goal.

Here's how to do it:

- Check with your doctor. Make sure that your health status allows lowering your caloric intake and increasing your physical activity.

- Follow a calorie-reduced but balanced diet that provides for as little as one or two pounds of weight loss a week. Be sure to include foods from the five major food groups, including a variety of fruits and vegetables (representing half a plate), along with whole grains, lean meat and low-fat dairy products. You may want to visit the current Dietary Guidelines at <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines>. Another educational resource is <http://www.choosemyplate.gov>, which provides information about MyPlate. This is a revision of the previous food pyramid designed to prompt consumers to think about building a healthy plate at mealtimes, and to seek more information to help them do that.
- Look for a farmer’s market or community supported agriculture (CSA) programs to try locally grown vegetables which are usually fresher and lower cost.
- Make time in your day for some form of physical activity. Start by taking the stairs at work, walking up or down an escalator, and parking at the far end of a lot instead of cruising around for the closest spot. Then, assuming your physician gives the okay, gradually add some form of regular physical activity that you enjoy. Walking is an excellent form of physical activity that almost everyone can do.
- Consider the benefits of moderate weight loss. There’s scientific evidence that losing five to 10 percent of your weight and keeping it off can benefit your health—lower your blood pressure, for example. If you are 5 feet 6 inches tall and weigh 180 pounds, and your goal weight is 150, losing five to 10 percent (nine to 18 pounds) is beneficial. When it comes to successful weight loss and weight management, steady and slow can be the way to go.

For many people who are overweight or obese, long-term—and healthy—weight management generally requires sensible goals and a commitment to make realistic changes in their lifestyle and improve their health. A lifestyle based on healthy eating and regular physical activity can be a real lifesaver.

Determining your weight/health profile

Overweight and obesity have been associated with increased risk of developing such conditions as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and coronary artery disease.

For most people, determining the circumference of your waist and your body mass index (BMI) are reliable ways to estimate your body fat and the health risks associated with being overweight, over-fat or obese. BMI is reliable for most people between 19 and 70 years of age except for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, competitive athletes, bodybuilders, and chronically ill patients. Generally, the higher your BMI, the higher your health risk, and the risk increases even further if your waist size is greater than 40 inches for men or 35 inches for women. There are other ways, besides BMI, to determine your body fat composition, and your doctor can tell you about them in more detail.

Several other factors, including your medical history, can increase your health risk.

See your doctor for advice about your overall health risk and the weight loss options that are best for you. Together, decide whether you should go on a moderate diet or whether other options might be appropriate.

Once you and your doctor have determined the type of diet that makes the most sense for you, you may want to choose a product or a plan to help you reach your goal. Consider: If your doctor prescribes a medication, ask about complications or side effects, and tell the doctor what other medications, including over-the-counter drug products, and dietary supplements you take and other conditions for which you're being treated. After you start taking the medication, tell the doctor about changes you experience, if any.

If your treatment includes periodic monitoring, counseling or other activities that require your attendance, make sure the location and appointment times are convenient.

Some methods for losing weight have more risks and complications than others. Ask for details about the side effects, complications or risks of any product or service that promotes weight loss and how to deal with problems should they occur. Where appropriate to the program, ask about the credentials and training of the program staff.

Ask for an itemized price list for all the costs of the plan you're considering, including membership fees, fees for weekly visits, costs of any diagnostic tests, costs for meal replacements, foods, nutritional supplements, or other products that are part of the weight loss program or plan.

Source: The Partnership for Healthy Weight Management.

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