



Frequently Asked Questions about Weight Loss

I know I need to lose weight, but how do I figure out how much I should lose?

There is no hard and fast answer to how much a person should weigh in order to be healthy. But, women need to be concerned about weight because it can and does affect overall health. Obesity, or being overweight, can result in premature death and can contribute to many problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, cancer, breathing problems, arthritis, and problems with pregnancy, labor and delivery.

The first, and best, thing to do is to talk with your health care provider about your weight. Together, you can talk about what a healthy weight is for you, based on your height, build (bone size, amount of muscle) and age. You can also use a tool called the *Body Mass Index* (BMI) to give you a pound range for a healthy weight. You take your weight and height and see where you fall on the BMI table for adults (see below). There is also a handy BMI calculator at the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's web site (see resources at the end of this FAQ).

FIGURE 1: ADULT BODY MASS INDEX

$$BMI = \left\{ \frac{\text{WEIGHT (pounds)}}{\text{HEIGHT (inches)}^2} \right\} \times 703$$

Height in Feet and Inches	Weight in Pounds															
	120	130	140	150	160	170	180	190	200	210	220	230	240	250		
4'6"	29	31	34	36	39	41	43	46	48	51	53	56	58	60		
4'8"	27	29	31	34	36	38	40	43	45	47	49	52	54	56		
4'10"	25	27	29	31	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	50	52		
5'0"	23	25	27	29	31	33	35	37	39	41	43	45	47	49		
5'2"	22	24	26	27	29	31	33	35	37	38	40	42	44	46		
5'4"	21	22	24	26	28	29	31	33	34	36	38	40	41	43		
5'6"	19	21	23	24	26	27	29	31	32	34	36	37	39	40		
5'8"	18	20	21	23	24	26	27	29	30	32	34	35	37	38		
5'10"	17	19	20	22	23	24	26	27	29	30	32	33	35	36		
6'0"	16	18	19	20	22	23	24	26	27	28	30	31	33	34		
6'2"	15	17	18	19	21	22	23	24	26	27	28	30	31	32		
6'4"	15	16	17	18	20	21	22	23	24	26	27	28	29	30		
6'6"	14	15	16	17	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	27	28	29		
6'8"	13	14	15	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	28		

Healthy Weight
Overweight
Obese

What is the best way to lose weight?

There is no "best" way to lose weight. Don't forget to talk with your doctor about setting up a weight loss plan.

The federal government has set dietary guidelines to aim for a healthy weight that you can check out at: <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2000/document/aim.htm> Also, see the federal government guidelines for healthy eating, using the food pyramid at: <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2000/document/build.htm>

Some general guidelines for losing weight safely are:

- Eat fewer calories. The best formula for losing weight is to decrease the number of calories you get while increasing your physical activity every day. Depending on how active you are, you may need between 1,500 — 2,500 calories a day. A safe plan is to eat 300 to 500 fewer calories a day to lose 1 to 2 pounds a week.

- Lose weight slowly. It is best to aim for losing 1/2 to 2 pounds a week. By improving eating and exercise habits, you will develop a healthier lifestyle. And, this will help you to control your weight over time. You will also lower your chances of getting heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. "Crash" diets may take off pounds faster, but can cause you to gain back even more pounds than you lost after you stop the diet.
- Exercise. Get active for at least 30 minutes every day. You don't have to train for a marathon to be active! Brisk walking, gardening, riding a bicycle, tennis and dancing all count as exercise. You can also break up the 30 minutes into three 10-minute periods. To get even more active every day, you can do things like park farther away from the mall in the parking lot and take the stairs instead of the elevator. The idea is to use up more calories than you eat each day. This will keep the calories from being stored as fat in your body.
- Eat less fat and sugar. This will help lower the number of calories you eat each day. Select foods whose labels say low, light or reduced to describe calories or fat, including milk products and cheese. Eat lean types of meat, poultry, and fish. Eat less sugar and fewer sweets (don't forget that soda and juice can have lots of sugar). Drink less or no alcohol.
- Eat a wide variety of foods, including starches and dairy products. This helps your body to get the nutrients and vitamins it needs to be healthy. Include plenty of vegetables, fruits, grain products and whole grains each day. Don't skip dairy products – there are many good tasting low, no, and reduced fat milks, yogurts, cheeses, ice creams, and other products to choose from. Proper calcium intake is needed for all women to prevent bone loss.

Starch is an important source of energy that all bodies need, even when a person is trying to lose weight. It is found in foods like potatoes, rice, pasta, bread, beans, and some vegetables. Foods high in starch can become high in fat and calories when you eat them in large amounts, or when they are made with rich sauces, oils, or other high-fat toppings like butter, sour cream, or mayonnaise. Stick to starchy foods that are high in fiber, like whole grains, beans, and peas.

- Practice portion control. Eat smaller amounts of food at each meal. Let go of belonging to the "clean plate club." Don't feel like you have to eat everything on your plate, even when eating out. You can also try eating more small meals throughout the day, rather than three large meals.
- Get support. It can be hard to start a weight loss program, particularly if you are out of shape and not used to exercising. Ask your family and friends for support. Try to find an exercise buddy. Make your activity fun and social – go on a walk or hike with a friend or learn a new sport like tennis or ice-skating.
- Treat yourself (once in a while). When trying to lose weight, we all feel tempted to "cheat" by eating a favorite, rich food like cake or cookies. But, sometimes it can be helpful to eat a small amount of a favorite food. This may keep you from craving it and overeating if you do "cheat."

What are high protein/low carbohydrate diets? Are they a healthy way to lose weight?

Most of a person's calories come from protein foods, like meat, eggs, and cheese when on a high-protein/low carbohydrate diet. This diet has fewer calories that come from carbohydrate foods, like breads, pasta, potatoes, fruits, and vegetables. Two problems with this type of diet are it: 1) can lack key nutrients found only in carbohydrates that a person needs to be healthy; 2) allows foods high in fat, which can raise blood cholesterol levels, increasing a person's risk for heart disease and some cancers.

These diets have become popular because people often lose weight quickly. But, most of the weight a person loses is water weight and lean muscle mass, not fat. Water is lost because the kidneys try to get rid of the excess waste products of protein and fat, called *ketones*, that the body makes. These diets are not a healthy way to lose weight. They overwork your kidneys, can cause dehydration, headaches, and bad breath. You can also feel nauseous, tired, weak, and dizzy. Health problems, like kidney stones and gout (a painful swelling of the joints) can develop as a result of these diets. A reduced-calorie diet that has a good balance of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats is the safest and best way to lose weight. You will also be more likely to keep the weight off over time.

Is it safe to use diet pills or herbal supplements when trying to lose weight?

There are many types of diet pills and herbal, or natural, supplements that you can buy over-the-counter at a drug or discount store, or on-line. You can't assume that a product that is called "natural" or "herbal" is safe. It may also hurt you if you are on other medications. It is best to always check with your doctor before using any herbal or natural weight-loss product.

Diet pills you can buy over-the-counter don't make much of a difference in how much weight you lose, how fast you lose it, or how long you keep the weight off. Some diet pills can raise your blood pressure. Also, cough or cold medicines often have the same drug used in diet pills. If you take both products together, you may get too much of the same drug and have harmful side effects. For some people, diet pills prescribed by a doctor can be helpful. If you do use these, be sure to follow your doctor's directions.

In 1997, The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) removed the weight-loss drug called Fen-Phen (*fenfluramine* and *dexfenfluramine*) from the market because this drug was found to cause heart valve disease. Today, there are weight loss products containing herbal fen-phen, which do not contain fenfluramine or dexfenfluramine, on the market. These products, not regulated by the FDA, often contain *ephedra* and have caused side effects in people using them. Always talk with your health care provider before taking any over-the-counter weight loss product, even if it is herbal or "natural."

Are there any weight loss programs that work?

There are many commercial weight loss programs that can help you to lose weight. While some people lose weight on their own, others find it very helpful and like the support of a structured program. If you think you might want to try a weight loss program, be sure to check it out before you sign up. It also may be helpful to talk it over with your health care provider.

Here are some questions you can ask to help you decide if a weight loss program will be right for you. Does the program:

- Offer counseling, or teach you how to change your eating and exercise habits?

- Have qualified counselors and health professionals, such as nutritionists, registered dietitians, doctors, nurses, psychologists, and exercise physiologists?
- Help you to deal with stress and how to avoid slipping back into old habits?
- Talk about how to keep weight off once you lose it?
- Have food choices that are flexible and suit you?
- Have you set weight goals with the help of a health professional?

There are other questions you can ask to figure out how well a program works. Not all programs collect this type of information, but it is still important to ask:

- How many people who begin the program actually finish it?
- About how much weight do most people lose who finish the program?
- Do people have problems or side effects and what are they?
- Are there any extra costs for the program, like dietary supplements or special brand foods?
- Do they have proof that their program works, not just praise given by other people?

Keep in mind that quick weight loss methods that rely on diet aids (like drinks, prepackaged foods, or diet pills) will not keep weight off in the long run. The best way to lose weight is slowly, with a healthy diet and exercise. The good eating and exercise habits you develop by losing weight this way will last a lifetime, helping you to control your weight and be healthy.

If I quit smoking, will I gain weight?

Not everyone gains weight when they quit smoking. Most people who do gain weight gain about 5 to 10 pounds when they stop smoking. You are more likely to gain weight if you have smoked for 10 to 20 years or smoked one or more packs of cigarettes a day. It helps to remember that you can lose this weight with healthy eating and exercise. And, the health effects of smoking are far worse than being a few pounds overweight. If you smoke, talk with your health care provider about quitting.

For more information...

You can find out more about weight loss by contacting the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) at (800) 994-WOMAN or the following organizations:

Weight Control Information Network

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)

Phone Number(s): (877) 946-4627

Web Site: <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/win.htm>

Food and Nutrition Information Center

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Phone Number(s): (301) 504-5414

Web Site: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/>

Food and Drug Administration

Phone Number(s): (888) 463-6332 (Consumer Information)

Web Site: <http://www.fda.gov>

Federal Trade Commission

Phone Number(s): (202) 326-2222

Web Site: <http://www.ftc.gov/>

American Heart Association

Phone Number(s): (800) 793-2665

Web Site: <http://www.americanheart.org/>

International Food Information Council

Phone Number(s): (202) 296-6540

Web Site: <http://ificinfo.health.org/>

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