

# Weight Control

## Losing weight and keeping it off

### Why don't diets seem to work?

“Going on” a diet isn't the answer to losing weight. This is because the weight is soon regained after you “go off” your diet. If diets really worked, there wouldn't be so many of them! Instead, your *usual* eating and exercising patterns need to be changed so that your weight stays right for you.

### How much should I weigh?

This is a tough question. Even though everyone talks about *weight*, it's really how much *fat* you have that matters. Two people can be the same height and weigh the same, but one person may look overweight and the other may look fine. Someone who exercises regularly and has more muscle looks thinner than someone who is inactive and has more fat.

You may think you should weigh less when your weight is really all right. Pictures of models in magazines pressure people into thinking that they should be very thin. This isn't true. Talk to your family doctor about what weight is right for you.

### What things contribute to being overweight?

Many things may contribute to weight problems. Overweight people often have struggled with their weight for a long time. You may believe that you don't have enough willpower to lose weight or to keep it off. But lack of willpower is seldom the problem. Many other things may be at the root of your weight problem, such as the things listed below.

#### Some causes of overweight

- Weight problems running in your family
- Eating when lonely, sad or stressed
- Being pressured to eat by friends or family
- Using food for recreation
- Taking medicine that makes you feel hungry
- A low metabolism (the rate you burn calories)
- Problems with hormone levels

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## What about when I eat because I feel sad or lonely?

Let yourself feel how you're feeling without eating. It's not the emotions that are making you gain weight. It's the eating that you may do in response to them. After you let yourself feel your emotions without eating, you may discover that eating doesn't really help you feel better. In fact it may make you feel worse. Not eating when you're stressed will get easier as you do it and see how good you feel later.

## How can I lose weight?

The best way is to work on the things that have contributed to your being overweight. A new diet plan may help you lose weight for a little while. But the weight often comes back unless you find new ways to deal with the things that have contributed to your being overweight. This may include learning new ways to deal with your stress, finding ways to feel less lonely or talking with a counselor about how you're feeling.

A few general tips may help you.

1. **A regular exercise program.** Few people lose weight and keep it off without exercise. Your doctor can help you plan an exercise program that will be right for you.
2. **A regular eating pattern.** For most people, this will be three meals a day. The three meals should be about equal in size, and the foods eaten should be low in fat.
3. **Support.** Support from family or friends is very important for long-term success in losing weight.

## Why is exercise a big deal?

Because it has so many benefits for people who want to lose weight. Regular exercise helps you burn calories faster, even when you're sitting still. It does this by raising your metabolism. It also helps you burn fat and build muscle. So, even if you don't lose pounds, you may lose inches.

Exercise also tends to curb your appetite. It's a healthy alternative to eating for entertainment. It can help reduce stress. And it's good for the health of your heart and bones.

## What's the best type of exercise?

The best kind of exercise is exercise that you'll keep doing throughout your life.

*Aerobic exercise* raises your heart rate and helps burn calories. The longer you exercise, the more your body will burn fat. Working out for 20 minutes or more at a time will help you get the most benefit from aerobic exercise. Aerobic exercises include swimming, walking fast, jogging and bicycling.

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Walking, even if you don't walk fast, can be very helpful. If you choose this as your exercise, work up to walking for one hour, five times a week.

Weight training along with aerobic exercise or walking is good because it will add muscle mass to your body. Muscle burns calories faster than fat.

The main thing to remember is that *any* sort of exercise is better than none at all.

## How can I make exercise a habit?

To be helpful in the long run, the exercise you choose can't be a drudge or a chore. Choose an exercise you enjoy. Choosing an exercise you can do with a friend may help. It may be hard for you to keep at something if you do it alone all of the time.

### Tips on losing weight

- Eat only until you feel full.
- Begin meals with soup, broth or something light.
- Eat vegetables, grain foods or other starchy foods, and protein foods at each meal.
- Eat slowly so your body has time to know when it's full.
- Exercise.
- Stock your desk or home cupboards with low-fat snacks.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Don't keep high-fat foods in the house.
- Let yourself indulge now and then. This helps you not feel deprived, which may cause you to eat too much later.

## How can I change my eating habits?

You've learned your eating habits over time. Don't expect to change them overnight. Change them one by one. Start by training yourself to eat without doing anything else at the same time. Focus on what you're doing and try to eat slowly. For example, don't eat while you watch TV.

It may not be easy at first. And it'll probably be easier to start slowly—maybe adding one new healthy habit at a time (like taking the stairs instead of the elevator or starting a walking program) or stopping one unhealthy habit (like eating donuts every morning).

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## What's so bad about high-fat foods?

Fat has more than twice the calories of carbohydrates and protein. Also, your body more easily uses fat calories to make body fat, compared with calories from carbohydrates or proteins. Fat in your diet may also confuse your appetite, not letting it tell you when you're full.

## Why is skipping meals not helpful?

Though skipping meals may work for a while, it backfires in the long run. This is because you get hungry and frustrated, and then eat too much at once.

You may be so used to skipping meals that you don't feel hungry at normal mealtimes. For example, you may not be hungry in the morning. But after about a month of eating a normal breakfast and lunch and a light dinner, your body will readjust.

## What can I say when my friends or family pressure me to eat?

Social pressure can be hard to resist. Sometimes a direct explanation and a request for support are enough to get people to understand. When that doesn't seem to be enough, telling them it's your "doctor's orders" may do the trick. If not, you may have to avoid those people until you feel comfortable enough with your new habits to take the pressure.

## Won't diet drugs help?

Diet drugs may help you get started to losing weight. Drugs such as fenfluramine (Pondimin) and desfenfluramine (Redux) help you lose weight by making you feel full. Other drugs work by controlling your desire for food (called *appetite suppressants*). Both kind of drugs have side effects.

Although diet drugs may help you lose weight at first, they don't help you keep the weight off. This is because taking drugs does not help you learn to change your habits. Making permanent changes in your eating and exercise habits is the only way to lose weight and keep it off.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.



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