

Weight-Loss Tips for the Elderly

Aging and weight gain

As you grow older, putting on weight becomes easier. Because of changes that occur with aging, you can gain weight even if you don't eat more. But you can lose weight and keep it off by eating less, exercising regularly and changing your eating habits. This handout offers some suggestions on ways to do this. Talk to your doctor before making any big changes in your diet and before beginning an exercise program.

As you get older, three things happen that can cause you to gain weight. First, you probably get less exercise than you did when you were younger. Second, your metabolic rate (the rate your body burns calories) decreases by about 2 percent every 10 years. Third, your body makes less protein. Because protein uses calories, this means the body doesn't need as many calories as it used to. For these reasons, you may need to eat less as you grow older. If you are overweight, a diet providing 1,200 calories a day can help you lose weight safely. A sample weight-loss diet is outlined on the following pages.

Getting enough vitamins and minerals

As you reduce the amount of food you eat, be sure you're getting enough vitamins and minerals to stay healthy. If you are on a low-calorie diet, you may want to take a multivitamin/mineral tablet daily. Your pharmacist can help you choose a good vitamin.

Calcium is important for older adults. After menopause, women need between 1,200 and 1,500 milligrams (mg) of calcium daily; men over 70 years old need the same amount. The sample meal plan provides about 600 mg of calcium daily. So you should take an extra 500 to 1,000 mg. Your multivitamin/mineral supplement may provide extra calcium, or you can take a 250-mg calcium tablet two to four times a day. If dairy products (the best source of dietary calcium) upset your stomach, try milk treated with lactase enzyme (such as LactAid) or taking LactAid tablets.

Vitamin D is needed to help you absorb the calcium. Your body can produce enough vitamin D if you spend about 15 minutes in the sun a day, or you can choose milk products that have vitamin D added to them.

Watching the fat in your diet

Limiting the total amount of fat you eat to less than 30 percent of your daily calories will help you lose weight. Reducing the amount of saturated fats and cholesterol in your diet can also help lower your cholesterol level and risk of heart disease. Eating fish, poultry and lean cuts of red meat, and limiting the amounts to 5 or 6 ounces a day, will help you control your fat intake. (A 3-ounce serving of meat is about the size of a deck of playing cards.) Bake or broil meats instead of frying them. Use skim milk and low-fat or non-fat cheese and yogurt instead of those with a higher fat content.

Eating out

When dining in restaurants, be careful about portion sizes. Don't feel like you have to eat everything on your plate. Share a meal, order appetizers or take some food home. And avoid alcoholic beverages—they're high in "empty" calories (those with no nutritional value).

Exercising

One of the best ways to stay healthy and avoid gaining weight is to exercise. The easiest way to exercise is to walk every day. Walk as fast as you can while still being able to talk without getting out of breath. Walk as far as you can, but not so far that your muscles ache by the time you return home. If walking is hard, try stretching or strengthening exercises, chair exercises, water aerobics or swimming.

Making lasting changes

The most important part of a weight-loss program is keeping your weight at a normal level. This requires a long-term commitment, which may involve changing your eating habits and lifestyle. A support group like Weight Watchers or Overeaters Anonymous may be helpful. Keep your focus on the day-to-day and your new efforts will soon seem like old habits.

Suggested 1,200-Calorie Weight-Loss Diet

Choose these servings from the following lists:

Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snack
1 starch/bread	1 starch/bread	1 starch/bread	1 starch/bread
1 fruit	2 meat (protein)	3 meat (protein)	1 fruit
1 milk	1 vegetable	1 vegetable	1 milk
	Raw vegetables (such as salad greens, carrots, celery) as desired	Raw vegetables as desired	
	1 fruit	1 fruit	
	1 fat	1 fat	

Starch/bread servings (about 80 calories each)

1 slice bread	6 saltine-type crackers
1/2 cup hot cereal	5 slices Melba toast
3/4 cup dry cereal (non-sugar-coated)	8 animal crackers
1-1/2 cups puffed cereal	6 round, butter-type crackers*
1/2 bagel or English muffin	4 RyKrisp crackers (2 x 3 1/2 inches)
1 small waffle (4-1/2 inches in diameter)*	2 to 4 whole wheat crackers, no fat (1 ounce), such as Finn or Wasa
2 small pancakes (4 inches in diameter)*	4 to 6 whole wheat crackers, fat added (1 ounce), such as Triscuits*
1 small doughnut or muffin (plain)*	3 cups popcorn (air-popped, no fat)
1 small dinner roll	6 vanilla wafers* or 3 gingersnaps
1/2 cup noodles, potatoes or pasta	1/2 cup sugar-free pudding (made with skim milk)
1/2 cup corn, peas or winter squash	1/2 cup ice milk or 1/4 cup sherbet
1/2 cup lima beans	1/3 cup frozen yogurt
1/3 cup white or brown rice	1 ounce snack chips*
1 cup broth-based soup	
1 cup cream soup made with water*	
3 graham crackers (2-1/2 inches square)	

Meat (protein) servings (up to 75 calories per ounce)

1 ounce lean beef, pork, poultry or fish	1/4 cup low-fat cottage cheese
1 ounce cheese, preferably low-fat	1 tablespoon peanut butter
1/4 cup water-packed tuna	1 egg or 2 egg whites

Fruit servings (about 60 calories each)

2 tablespoons raisins or 2 small plums	1/3 cantaloupe or 1/8 honeydew melon
1/2 cup canned fruit or juice (unsweetened)	1/2 small grapefruit
1 small piece fresh fruit	1/2 banana (4-1/2 inches long)
3/4 cup fresh melon cubes or berries	

Vegetable servings (about 25 calories each)

1/2 cup cooked vegetables (other than those on the starch/bread list)

*Omit one fat serving or use only now and then because these contain added fat.

**Omit or use sparingly if salt intake is limited.

Milk servings (about 80 calories each)

8 ounces (1 cup) skim milk

8 ounces plain nonfat yogurt (may be sweetened with sugar substitute)

Fat servings (about 45 calories each)

1 teaspoon margarine or oil

1 tablespoon diet margarine

2 teaspoons dressing, such as Miracle Whip

2 tablespoons reduced-calorie dressing

1 teaspoon mayonnaise (1 tablespoon if “light”)

1 tablespoon salad dressing, such as French dressing

1 tablespoon cream cheese

2 tablespoons half-and-half

2 tablespoons sour cream or gravy

Foods that may be used as desired (“free” foods)

Sugar substitutes

Boullion, fat-free broth or consommé

Catsup (1 tablespoon) or mustard**

Coffee, tea or sugar-free beverages

Cranberries or rhubarb (sweetened with sugar substitute)

Flavoring extracts

Sugar-free gelatin

Herbs and spices

Dietetic or low-sugar jam or jelly (2 teaspoons or less than 20 calories)

Low-calorie salad dressing or fat-free mayonnaise (2 tablespoons or less than 20 calories)

Horseradish

Lemon or lime juice

Meat sauces (without sugar)**

Nonstick pan spray

Pickles (dill or sour)**

Salad greens

Salt** and pepper

Vinegar

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**Omit or use sparingly if salt intake is limited.

Adapted from “Twin Cities District Dietetic Association. The manual of clinical nutrition.” Minneapolis: Chronimed, 1988:64-5. Used with permission.

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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