

## **Weight Management**

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### **DEFINITION**

The most effective diet is not a diet at all, but a gradual change in eating and physical activity habits that you can continue for the rest of your life. The best way to find a safe, healthy and effective weight reduction and maintenance program is to seek the advice of your health care provider.

Losing weight requires a change in behavior that almost always involves:

- Better understanding your own health
- Healthy eating habits
- Increasing your physical activity.

An efficient way to lose weight is to reduce the number of calories and improve the quality of the foods you choose. It is best to lose weight slowly but steadily, so you can maintain your ideal weight after you have reached your goal.

A weight reduction diet needs to provide adequate nutrition, a good variety of foods and a reduction in calories. This is usually best done by limiting fat, especially saturated fat, in the diet. Pregnant women should not go on a weight reduction diet.

### **OBESITY AND RISK FACTORS**

If your weight is substantially above what is healthy for a person with your body composition, genetic background and overall health status, you may be considered obese. Your doctor can tell you whether or not your weight puts you in the category of being obese. Obesity is a serious condition, because it may increase your risk of:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Arthritis
- Cancer.

Your frame size or body build is determined by the thickness of the bones in your elbows, knees, ankles and wrists. It is important to consider body composition. If you are muscular and athletic, you may weigh more than a sedentary person of the same height and frame size, yet you may be trim, while your sedentary counterpart may be overweight. If your weight comes from muscle, you may fall technically into the overweight category yet not be fat. However, in general, as you approach 20 percent or more above your desirable weight, your excess weight usually comes from fat.

### **SELECTING FOODS**

Keep a food diary. As soon as you eat or drink, write it down. It may be helpful to use a small pocket diary. Seeing what you eat and drink will help you examine your eating patterns and food habits.

Follow these guidelines to select foods to lose weight in a healthy manner:

- Drink at least six 8-ounce glasses of water each day
- Choose unlimited amounts of vegetables and salads, with low fat or fat free salad dressing
- Choose lean meats, poultry and fish that is baked or broiled
- Choose regular but limited amounts of low-fat or skim milk, cheeses and yogurts
- Avoid saturated fats such as butter, margarine and fried foods.

To have a balanced diet, be sure to choose a variety of foods from the five basic food groups:

- Dairy
- Meat and other protein
- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Bread and cereal.

### **COUNTING CALORIES**

A calorie is a unit of measurement used to express the energy value of food. Your body burns calories to use for basic body functions. Proteins, carbohydrates and fats contain calories and produce energy. To lose weight, reduce your calorie intake (without giving up nutrition) while increasing the number of calories used in physical activity.

- Eating 500 calories less a day can result in losing one pound a week.
- One to two pounds is the ideal amount of weight to lose in a week, because if you lose more, you lose muscle rather than fat
- Average men need 2500 to 3000 calories a day; however, for weight reduction 1500 to 1800 calories a day is recommended
- Average women need 1800 to 2300 calories a day; however, for weight reduction 1200 to 1500 calories a day is recommended
- Weight loss may occur more quickly at the beginning of a diet because the body releases extra water that was retained.

### **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

The rate at which you can lose weight depends on your body's metabolism. This is the rate at which your body uses the energy from food for basic body functions. Increasing physical activity can increase metabolism.

Add daily exercise, such as walking, to your routine. Start with a comfortable goal, such as five to fifteen minutes per day. Walk this amount at least four to seven times a week, if you can manage. Each week add five minutes to your time, until after several weeks you have worked up to 30 to 40 minutes per day.

In addition to the calories you are burning as you walk, regular physical activity increases your metabolic rate. Therefore, you will be using more calories 24 hours a day, even as you sleep. If you are unable to walk, ask your health care professional to recommend an alternative exercise.

In addition to helping you lose or maintain your weight, regular physical activity lowers your pulse, blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar. It also helps increase your energy level.

**OTHER HELPFUL HINTS**

- Sit down and relax while you eat your meals
- Avoid distractions such as the telephone and television
- Chew your food thoroughly to help digestion
- Eat small, frequent meals.