

# WIN

Weight-control Information Network

# Weight Loss *for*

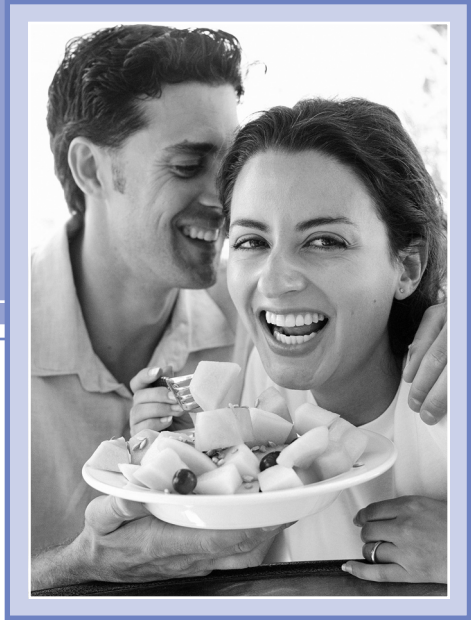
# Life



US DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND HUMAN SERVICES  
National Institutes of Health



# Weight Loss for Life



**T**here are many ways to lose weight, but it is not always easy to keep the weight off. The key to successful weight loss is making changes in your eating and physical activity habits that you can keep up for the rest of your life. The information presented here may help put you on the road to healthy habits.

# Can I benefit from weight loss?

Health experts agree that you may gain health benefits from even a small weight loss if:

- ◆ You are obese based on your body mass index (BMI) (see BMI chart on page 3).
- ◆ You are overweight based on your BMI and have weight-related health problems or a family history of such problems.
- ◆ You have a waist that measures more than 40 inches if you are a man or more than 35 inches if you are a woman.

A weight loss of 5 to 15 percent of body weight may improve your health and quality of life, and prevent these health problems. For a person who weighs 200 pounds, that means losing 10 to 30 pounds.

**Some Weight-related Health Problems**

- ✓ diabetes
- ✓ heart disease or stroke
- ✓ high blood pressure
- ✓ high cholesterol
- ✓ gallbladder disease
- ✓ some types of cancer
- ✓ osteoarthritis (*wearing away of the joints*)
- ✓ sleep apnea (*interrupted breathing during sleep*)

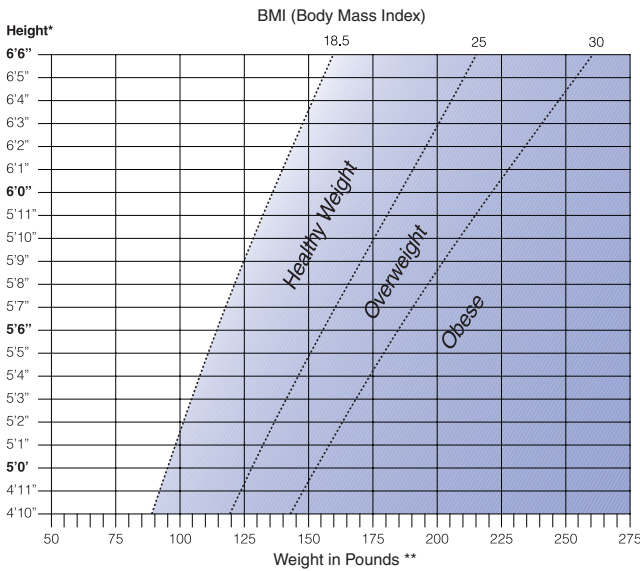
Even if you do not need to lose weight, you still should follow healthy eating and physical activity habits to help prevent weight gain and stay healthy as you age.

# How can I lose weight?

Your body weight is controlled by the number of calories you eat and the number of calories you use each day.

To lose weight you need to take in fewer calories than you use. You can do this by creating and following a plan for healthy eating and a plan for regular physical activity.

## Body Mass Index



### Sources

- George Bray, M.D., Pennington Biomedical Research Center.
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's *Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults: The Evidence Report*

Find your weight on the bottom of the graph. Go straight up from that point until you come to the line that matches your height. Then look to find your weight group.

\* Without Shoes

\*\*Without Clothes

You may also choose to follow a formal weight-loss program that can help you make lifelong changes in your eating and physical activity habits. See page 6 for more information on weight-loss programs.

## Your Plan for Healthy Eating

A weight-loss “diet” that limits your portions to a very small size or that excludes certain foods may be hard to stick to. It may not work over the long term. Instead, a healthy eating plan takes into account your likes and dislikes, and includes a variety of foods that give you enough calories and nutrients for good health.

### **Make sure your healthy eating plan is one that:**

- ◆ Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.

The **Nutrition Facts** label from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is found on most packaged foods. It tells you how many calories and how much fat, protein, carbohydrate, and other nutrients are in one serving of the food. For more information on the Nutrition Facts, see “Other Resources” at the end of this brochure.

- ◆ Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, bean, eggs, and nuts.
- ◆ Is low in saturated fats, *trans* fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.



For more specific information about food groups and nutrition values, visit <http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines>.

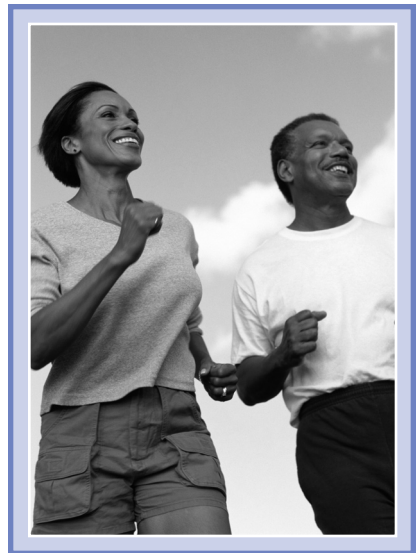
## Your Plan for Regular Physical Activity

Regular physical activity may help you lose weight and keep it off. It may also improve your energy level and mood, and lower your risk for developing diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers.

Any amount of physical activity is better than none. Experts recommend doing at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most or all days of the week for good health. To lose weight or maintain a weight loss, you may need to do more than 30 minutes of physical activity a day, as well as follow your healthy eating plan.

You can get your daily 30 minutes or more all at once, or break it up into shorter sessions of 20, 15, or even 10 minutes. Try some of these moderate-intensity physical activities:

- ◆ walking (15 minutes per mile or 4 miles per hour)
- ◆ biking
- ◆ tennis
- ◆ aerobic exercise classes (step aerobics, kick boxing, dancing)
- ◆ energetic house or yard work (gardening, raking, mopping, vacuuming)





## What types of weight-loss programs are available?

There are two different types of weight-loss programs—clinical and nonclinical. Knowing what a good program will offer and what to watch out for may help you choose a weight-loss program that will work for you.

### Nonclinical Program

**What it is:** A nonclinical program may be commercially operated, such as a privately

owned weight-loss chain. You can follow a non-clinical program on your own by using a counselor, book, website, or weight-loss product. You can also join others in a support group, worksite program,

or community-based program. Nonclinical weight-loss programs may require you to use the program's foods or supplements.

#### **What a safe and effective program will offer:**

- ◆ Books, pamphlets, and websites that are written or reviewed by a licensed health professional such as a medical doctor (M.D.) or registered dietitian (R.D.).
- ◆ Balanced information about following a healthy eating plan and getting regular physical activity.



- ◆ Leaders or counselors who show you their training credentials. (Program leaders or counselors may not be licensed health professionals.)

### **Program cautions:**

- ◆ If a program requires you to buy prepackaged meals, find out how much the meals will cost—they may be expensive. Also, eating prepackaged meals does not let you learn the food selection and cooking skills you will need to maintain weight loss over the long term.
- ◆ Avoid any diet that suggests you eat a certain formula, food, or combination of foods for easy weight loss. Some of these diets may work in the short term because they are low in calories. But they may not give you all the nutrients your body needs and they do not teach healthy eating habits.



- ◆ Avoid programs that do not include a physical activity plan.
- ◆ *Talk to your health care provider before using any weight-loss product, such as a supplement, herb, or over-the-counter medication.*

## **Clinical Program**

**What it is:** A clinical program provides services in a health care setting, such as a hospital. One or more licensed health professionals, such as medical doctors, nurses, registered



*and you have weight-related health problems, you may consider using prescription weight-loss drugs. Drugs should be used as part of an overall program that includes long-term changes in eating and physical activity habits. Only a licensed health care provider can prescribe these drugs. See “Additional Reading” for more information about prescription medications for the treatment of obesity.*

dietitians, and psychologists, provide care. A clinical program may or may not be commercially owned.

Clinical programs may offer services such as nutrition education, physical activity, and behavior change therapy. Some programs offer prescription weight-loss drugs or gastrointestinal surgery.

### **Prescription Weight-loss Drugs**

*If your BMI is 30 or more, or your BMI is 27 or more*

### **Gastrointestinal Surgery**

*If your BMI is 40 or more, or your BMI is 35 or more and you have weight-related health problems such as diabetes or heart disease, you may consider gastrointestinal surgery (also called bariatric surgery). Most patients lose weight quickly, and many keep off most of their weight with a healthy eating plan and regular physical activity. Still, surgery can lead to problems that require more operations. Surgery may also reduce the amount of*

vitamins and minerals in your body and cause gallstones. See “Additional Reading” for more information about gastrointestinal surgery.

**What a safe and effective program will offer:**

- ◆ A team of licensed health professionals.
- ◆ A plan to help you keep weight off after you have lost it.

**Program cautions:**

- ◆ There may be side effects or health risks involved in the program that can be serious. Discuss these with your health care provider.

For more detailed information about choosing a safe

and successful weight-loss program, see “Additional Reading” at the end of this brochure.

## Additional Reading

Fact sheets offering related information from the Weight-control Information Network (WIN) are listed below.

**Active at Any Size**

describes the benefits of being physically active no matter what a person’s size, and presents a variety of activities that large people can enjoy safely.

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It is not always easy to change your eating  
and physical activity habits.  
You may have setbacks along the way.  
But keep trying—you can do it!

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## **Choosing a Safe and Successful Weight-loss Program**

provides a list of things to look for when choosing a safe and effective weight-loss program, as well as a list of questions to ask program providers.

## **Gastrointestinal Surgery for Severe Obesity**

describes the different types of surgery available to treat severe obesity. It explains how gastrointestinal surgery promotes weight loss and the benefits and risks of each procedure.

## **Just Enough for You**

describes the difference between a portion—the amount of food a person chooses to eat—and a measured serving. It offers tips for judging portion sizes and for controlling portions at home and when eating out.

## **Prescription Medications for the Treatment of Obesity**

presents information on medications that suppress

appetite or reduce the body's ability to absorb dietary fat. The types of medications and the risks and benefits of each are described.

## **Walking...A Step in the Right Direction**

offers tips for getting started on a walking program and illustrates warm-up stretching exercises. It also includes a sample walking program.

## **Weight and Waist**

**Measurement** explains two simple measures—BMI and waist circumference—to help people determine if their weight and/or body fat distribution are putting their health at risk.

# Other Resources

U.S. Department of Agriculture April 2005.  
My Pyramid Plan,  
*<http://www.mypyramid.gov>*

FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

Guidance on How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label. June 2000. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html>.

Blair SN, Dunn AL, Marcus BH, Carpenter RA, Jaret P. *Active Living Every Day: 20 Weeks to Lifelong Vitality*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics; 2001. Available from <http://www.humankinetics.com>, or your local or online bookstore.

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The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a national information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health, which is the Federal Government's lead agency responsible for biomedical research on nutrition and obesity. Authorized by Congress (Public Law 103-43), WIN provides the general public, health professionals, the media, and Congress with up-to-date, science-based health information on weight control, obesity, physical activity, and related nutritional issues.

Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This publication was also reviewed by F. Xavier Pi-Sunyer, M.D., M.P.H., Director, New York Obesity Research Center, St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center, and English H. Gonzalez, M.D., M.P.H., Community Medicine and Curriculum Development Coordinator, Medical Center East Family Practice Residency Program.

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