

# Improving Your Health

## Tips for African American Men and Women

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND HUMAN SERVICES

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

NIDDK | NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF  
DIABETES AND DIGESTIVE  
AND KIDNEY DISEASES

### WIN Weight-control Information Network

You do not have to stop eating chocolate cake or start running marathons to improve your health. Making small but steady changes in your eating and physical activity habits, over time, may help you lose weight if you need to, feel better, and improve your health. The information below can help you start to change your physical activity and eating habits. When you make changes to improve your health, you may also move your friends and family to do the same.

### Am I overweight?

Overweight and obesity in adults can be defined using the body mass index (BMI), a tool that measures weight in relation to height. The table on the next page shows how BMI calculation works. A BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 refers to a healthy weight, a BMI of 25 to 29.9 refers to overweight, and a BMI of 30 or higher refers to obesity.

For more information about evaluating your body weight, read the Weight-control Information Network (WIN) fact sheet *Weight and Waist Measurement: Tools for Adults*.

### What if I think I look fine?

Even if you are considered overweight according to charts and measures, you may like the size and shape of your body and not want to lose weight. Your friends and family may think you look great too. But the health

benefits of getting fit and eating well are clear. Once you decide to lose weight, your loved ones may want to join you on your journey to better health.

### Am I risking my health by being overweight?

Being overweight can be dangerous to your health. If you are considered overweight or obese, you are more likely to develop:

- type 2 diabetes
- high blood pressure
- heart disease
- certain forms of cancer

You can help lower your risk for many health problems by losing weight. Losing 5 to 10 percent of your body weight can help improve your health. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, losing 10 to 20 pounds may help lower your blood pressure and cholesterol level. Slow and steady weight loss of 1/2 to 2 pounds per week is the safest way to lose weight.

### How do I start to lose weight and improve my health?

You may find it helpful to participate in a weight-loss program. If so, talk with a health care professional about controlling your

Table 1: Body Mass Index

	NORMAL						OVERWEIGHT					OBESE									EXTREME OBESITY			
BMI	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42
Height (Feet-Inches)	Weight (Pounds)																							
4' 10"	91	96	100	105	110	115	119	124	129	134	138	143	148	153	158	162	167	172	177	181	186	191	196	201
4' 11"	94	99	104	109	114	119	124	128	133	138	143	148	153	158	163	168	173	178	183	188	193	198	203	208
5' 00"	97	102	107	112	118	123	128	133	138	143	148	153	158	163	168	174	179	184	189	194	199	204	209	215
5' 01"	100	106	111	116	122	127	132	137	143	148	153	158	164	169	174	180	185	190	195	201	206	211	217	222
5' 02"	104	109	115	120	126	131	136	142	147	153	158	164	169	175	180	186	191	196	202	207	213	218	224	229
5' 03"	107	112	118	124	130	135	141	146	152	158	163	169	174	180	186	191	197	203	208	214	220	225	231	237
5' 04"	110	116	122	128	134	140	145	151	157	163	169	175	180	186	191	197	204	209	215	221	227	232	238	244
5' 05"	114	120	126	132	138	144	150	156	162	168	174	180	186	192	198	204	210	216	222	228	234	240	246	252
5' 06"	118	124	130	136	142	148	155	161	167	173	179	186	192	198	204	210	216	223	229	235	241	247	253	260
5' 07"	121	127	134	140	146	153	159	166	172	178	185	191	198	204	211	217	223	230	236	242	249	255	261	268
5' 08"	125	131	138	144	151	158	164	171	177	184	190	197	204	210	216	223	230	236	243	249	256	262	269	276
5' 09"	128	135	142	149	155	162	169	176	182	189	196	203	210	216	223	230	236	243	250	257	263	270	277	284
5' 10"	132	139	146	153	160	167	174	181	188	195	202	209	216	222	229	236	243	250	257	264	271	278	285	292
5' 11"	136	143	150	157	165	172	179	186	193	200	208	215	222	229	236	243	250	257	265	272	279	286	293	301
6' 00"	140	147	154	162	169	177	184	191	199	206	213	221	228	235	242	250	258	265	272	279	287	294	302	309
6' 01"	144	151	159	166	174	182	189	197	204	212	219	227	235	242	250	257	265	275	280	288	295	302	310	318
6' 02"	148	155	163	171	179	186	194	202	210	218	225	233	241	249	256	264	272	280	287	295	303	311	319	326
6' 03"	152	160	168	176	184	192	200	208	216	224	232	240	248	256	264	272	279	287	295	303	311	319	327	335
6' 04"	156	164	172	180	189	197	205	213	221	230	238	246	254	263	271	279	287	295	304	312	320	328	336	344

Adapted from: George Bray, Pennington Biomedical Research Center; *Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults: The Evidence Report*, National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, September 1998.

weight before you decide on a program. Doctors do not always address issues such as healthy eating, physical activity, and weight management during general office visits. It is important for you to start the discussion in order to get the information you need. Even if you feel uncomfortable talking about your

weight with your doctor, remember that he or she is there to help you improve your health.

When you are ready to start toward a healthy weight and improve your health, try to:

- Be more physically active.
- Eat healthier.

## Be More Physically Active

Regular, moderate-intensity physical activity can be fun and help you feel great. When you share physical activity with your friends and family, it can also be a social event. Perhaps members of your church or place of worship would be interested in starting an exercise program at the place where you gather.

Make it your goal to try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week. You may need to be physically active for more than 30 minutes a day to help you lose and keep off extra weight.

Note: If you are a man over age 40 or a woman over age 50, or if you have chronic health problems such as heart disease, high

blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, or obesity, talk to your doctor before starting a vigorous physical activity program.

## What is moderate-intensity physical activity?

Examples of moderate-intensity physical activity include:

- Walking 2 miles in 30 minutes.
- Bicycling 5 miles in 30 minutes.
- Dancing fast for 30 minutes.

Sometimes starting and sticking with a physical activity program can be a challenge. Figuring out how to beat your physical activity roadblocks may make it easier for you to get and stay active.

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## Beat your physical activity roadblocks!

### If you...

Do not have child care.

Do not have time or are too busy to be physically active.

Do not like or do not want to exercise.

Do not feel safe being physically active in your neighborhood.

### Then try...

Sharing physical activities such as walking, biking, or playing tag with your child each day.

Doing 10 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity three times a day, or putting more energy than normal into activities like housework, yard work, and playing with the kids.

Doing something you enjoy, like dancing to the radio or planning active outings with a friend, family member, or group.

Forming a group of people to walk, jog, or bike together, working out with videos in your home, or walking in a shopping mall.

## Tips for Active Women

You can be active and still keep your hairstyle. Talk to your hair stylist about a hair care routine and style that fit your active life. You might try wearing:

- a natural hairstyle
- a style that can be wrapped or pulled back
- a short haircut
- braids, twists, or locs

## Tips for Active Men

Sometimes even the most active guys can be sidelined by lack of time, loss of motivation, and even injury. Here are some ways to keep men moving:

- All types of activity count. In addition to “working out,” activities like chores, walking the dog, and playing outside with the kids add to your daily total.
- When you do work out, think of it as three parts: the warm-up, the workout, and the cool-down. Warm up by moving your muscles for 5 to 10 minutes. For example, try jumping jacks or push-ups. Now you are ready to work out. Finally, cool down by walking slowly for 5 to 10 minutes. Do light stretching after your warm-up and cool-down routines. This may help keep you injury-free.
- Try going to the gym with a friend. Or get some friends together for a pick-up basketball or soccer game. Working out with friends may help keep you motivated to stay active. Signing up for a charitable 5K walk or run may also keep you motivated and on track.

## Eat Healthier

When you begin to change your eating habits to improve your health, try to:

- Make healthier food choices.
- Eat just enough food for you.

## Make Healthier Food Choices

A healthy eating plan includes a variety of foods from every food group.

In January 2005, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) jointly released the updated *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. These new guidelines outline recommendations to promote health and reduce the risk of chronic disease through nutritious eating and physical activity.

The new guidelines encourage Americans over 2 years of age to eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods. Recommended items include fruits, vegetables, fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products, lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, nuts, and whole grains such as brown rice and whole-wheat bread. The guidelines also recommend a diet low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.

Making healthy food choices may seem difficult when you do not have time to cook or your family wants fast food. However, you and your family and friends can make healthier food choices. Try these tips:

- Keeping a bowl of fruit on the table, bags of mini carrots in the refrigerator, and boxes of raisins in the cupboard are simple ways to eat more fruits and vegetables.

- Try not to keep a lot of sweets like cookies, candy, or soda in the house, car, or workplace. Too many sweets can crowd out healthier foods.
- If you do go to a fast food restaurant, try a salad or a grilled chicken sandwich (not fried) instead of a burger.

Social gatherings can be tricky when you are trying to make healthy choices. Try these ideas:

- Encourage members of your place of worship to bring healthier food options to events.
- Watch the amount of alcohol you drink. Alcohol contains no nutrients but plenty of calories. If you want to drink alcohol, try a light beer or a low-calorie spritzer (small amount of wine added to club soda).

*\* For more information about recommended daily intakes from various food groups, visit <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines>.*

### Do I need to drink milk?

A healthy eating plan includes a variety of foods that provide all of the nutrients the body needs. Milk is a good source of calcium. If you cannot digest lactose (the sugar found in milk), there are ways you can get calcium without drinking milk.

- Drink low-fat or fat-free “lactose-reduced” milk, or calcium-fortified soy-based beverages.
- Choose low-fat yogurt or reduced-fat hard cheeses like low-fat cheddar.
- Eat dark leafy vegetables like collard greens or kale.
- Eat canned fish with soft bones like salmon.

### Eat Just Enough for You

A healthy eating plan calls for making healthy food choices and eating just enough for you. Larger amounts of food have more calories. Eating more calories than your body needs may lead to weight gain.

To lose weight,  
learn to eat  
fewer calories.  
Do this by  
selecting foods  
that are lower in  
fat and calories  
from each food  
group.

## Sneaking In Fruits and Vegetables!

### If you love...

Pizza

### Try this...

You can still enjoy the occasional pizza, but go for the more healthy option. Try a vegetable pizza with three or more vegetable toppings, such as bell peppers, onions, and mushrooms.

Fast Food Hamburgers

Order a child-size hamburger meal. If that does not satisfy you, order a burger without the sauce and share the fries with a friend.

Cereal for Breakfast

Add some fresh fruits like strawberries, blueberries, or bananas to your cereal. You will add some sweetness to your breakfast while sneaking in a serving of fruit.

French Fries

Try mashed potatoes made with fat-free milk, a baked potato topped with a vegetable or fruit salsa, or a salad.

Dessert

Have a plate of fresh fruit with low-fat or fat-free cream. The natural sweetness from the fruit might satisfy your cravings for something sweet.

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Learning about the serving sizes of foods can help you eat just enough for you. Try to measure your food for a few days. This can help you learn to recognize what one serving of a food, such as 1/2 cup of rice, looks like on your plate.

To lose weight, learn to eat fewer calories. Do this by selecting foods that are lower in fat and calories from each food group. For example, choose low-fat cheese and extra lean meat. Also, choose plenty of vegetables. They are lower in calories and fat than other foods and can help you feel full.

## Keeping Your New Habits

The path to improving your eating and physical activity habits is not easy. But do not give up. Remember, sensible eating and regular physical activity, followed over time, are key to a healthy body, mind, and spirit!

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followed over time, are key to a healthy body, mind, and spirit!

## Additional Reading From the Weight-control Information Network

*Just Enough for You: About Food Portions.* August 2006. Available at [http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/just\\_enough.htm](http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/just_enough.htm).

*Walking...A Step in the Right Direction.* March 2007. Available at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/walking.htm>.

*Weight and Waist Measurement: Tools for Adults.* November 2008. Available at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/tools.htm>.

## Additional Resources

*MyPyramid.* This interactive website from USDA has detailed information about healthy eating and physical activity. It allows users to create a personalized eating and activity plan. Available at <http://www.mypyramid.gov>.

*National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP).* Publications from NDEP provide information about diabetes and obesity prevention and control. NDEP's publications catalog also offers resources specifically for African Americans. Available at <http://www.ndep.nih.gov/diabetes/pubs/catalog.htm>.

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The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a 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 Shiriki Kumanyika, Ph.D., M.P.H., Professor of Epidemiology and Associate Dean for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, and Gladys Gary Vaughn, Ph.D., National Program Leader, Cooperative Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This fact sheet is also available at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov>.

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