

The University of North Texas
Dining Services
White Paper: Wanting to Lose Weight

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Wanting to Lose Weight

There are many reasons why people may want to lost weight. Some people feel they would look more attractive if they were thinner and some may choose to lose weight for health reasons. Whatever the reason may be, it is advisable to go about losing weight in the healthiest manner. Working with your doctor and/or a dietitian can help you pinpoint if you need to lose weight and how to go about doing so.

What is Overweight or Obese?

What does it mean to be “overweight” or “obese”? The CDC defines overweight as a BMI between 25 and 29.9, and obesity as a BMI of 30 or greater (1). BMI is your weight in relationship to your height. There are, however, exceptions to using BMI as the sole guideline for being overweight. Some exceptions include body builders or other extremely lean athletes who may weigh a lot for their height, but whom have very little fat. Why? Muscle weighs more than fat does, so even though the scale may be telling them they weigh a lot, most of that weight is in the form of muscle, not fat. The bottom line is that BMI can be an indicator for the normal person to determine if they are overweight, but that person should take other things, including health status, into account.

Complications of Being Overweight or Obese

Why should I or UNT care if I’m “overweight” or “obese”? Let’s make it clear that the main issue should not solely be about weight. Think of it as your overall health, not a number on a scale, or what size clothes you wear. UNT cares because we want to have healthy students. A student can be “overweight” and still be healthy. Seek the advice and medical attention of your doctor to determine if your body is working correctly, in spite of how much you weigh.

If you are obese, and even overweight, you may be at risk for several diseases and conditions including:

- Coronary heart disease
- Stroke
- Type 2 diabetes
- Cancers (endometrial, ovaries, breast, prostate, rectum and colon)
- Hypertension or high blood pressure
- Dyslipidemia (high blood cholesterol, high blood triglycerides)
- Liver and gallbladder disease
- Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
- Osteoarthritis (degeneration of cartilage and its underlying bone within a joint)
- Gynecological problems for women (abnormal menstrual periods and infertility)
- Depression
- Metabolic syndrome
- Skin problems, such as intertrigo and impaired wound healing (2, 3)

It is in the interest of you, your family and friends, UNT, and even the country to help people reduce your risk for these diseases and conditions by aiding you in achieving your healthy weight.

Possible Causes of Overweight or Obesity

There are many factors which can cause or increase the likelihood of a person to become overweight or obese. The biggest factor is eating more calories than your body can burn for normal body function and physical activity. In other words, taking in more energy than you use. Other factors include:

- Family history and genes
- Medications. Some antidepressants, anti-seizure medications, diabetes medications, steroids and beta blockers may cause weight gain.

- Social networks and economics research suggests people may be at greater risk for being overweight or obese if their friends are; other data shows people at lower economic levels have a greater chance of being obese.
- Lifestyle habits, eating behaviors and stress.
- Too little sleep. This can affect hormones that increase appetite.
- Medical problems, such as hypothyroidism, Prader-Willi and polycystic ovary syndrome.

(4)

In college, many students gain weight typically referred to as “the Freshmen 15.” Studies have shown that many freshmen gain weight, but more around the 10 pound mark. This appears to be due to a decrease in regular physical activity or sports involvement, dining halls with buffet-style portions and options, increased snacking, and drinking high calorie beverages such as soda, alcohol, and sugary, fatty coffee drinks (5).

Words of Caution for Fad Diets

Before starting a weight-loss program, beware of “fad diets” or products that claim they can make you lose a lot of weight fast and with little effort. The common phrase is, “if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!!!!!!” The American Dietetic Association (ADA) has this to say on their website, “There are no foods or pills that magically burn fat. No super foods will alter your genetic code. No products will miraculously melt fat while you watch TV or sleep. Some ingredients in supplements and herbal products can be dangerous and even *deadly* for some people.” (6) They warn that these diets and/or products will claim rapid weight loss, no need to exercise, or a special food combination as the key to weight loss, which is not true.

As far as rapid weight loss goes, a lot of that weight may be in the form of water, not actual fat loss. Secondly, you may gain that weight back quickly *plus* extra pounds! The recommendation by the ADA is to lose between ½ to 1 pound per week and the Mayo Clinic recommends 1 to 2 pounds per week (6, 7).

How to Lose Weight

For most people, the word “exercise” can bring about feelings of anxiety. What type of exercise, how much, when am I going to find the time? These may all be questions that pop into your head and make it all the more appealing to skip it all together. This is why so many diets and diet products make the claim that you can lose weight without exercise. They are exploiting people’s desire to lose weight in a way that can be easy. In a study reviewed by the Mayo Clinic, more than 90% of successful weight losers incorporated exercise into their lives. Usually the type of exercise was just walking, they did not need to run a marathon, or engage in other really vigorous exercise (8). Exercise will improve your health even if you do not lose weight. It strengthens your muscles, including your heart muscle, improves your oxygen uptake (the more aerobic activity you get, the easier it will be to breathe during that activity), and will even improve the health of your GI tract.

Eating specific foods or specific combinations of foods will help with weight loss. There is no magic food that will melt away the pounds. Often diets like these, such as the “grapefruit diet” or “cabbage soup diet,” are successful in the beginning only because your caloric intake is so low when your diet consists of these naturally low calorie foods. But do you really want to eat these foods day after day, week after week? No, it would be boring. Not to mention one or two foods will not provide all the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients your body needs to function (6). Later, when you switch back to your old eating patterns, you are likely to gain the weight back.

So, if all these other things won’t work in the long run, how can I lose weight and keep it off? You have heard it before: reduce your caloric intake and exercise. There is a reason that this is common knowledge: because it will work. Yes, it is difficult, and you may need guidance and encouragement, but little steps that you can live with will make the most difference over the long term.

Here are some suggestions for simple ways to either add exercise to your day in order to use more calories and ways to cut out calories in your diet:

- Do not skip breakfast or any other meal. You’re likely to overeat at the next meal.

- Watch your portions. Don't overload your plate with super-sized portions.
- Drink water, not calories. High-calorie beverages like soft drinks, juice drinks, energy drinks, specialty coffees and alcohol add calories just like solid foods. Whenever possible, replace these drinks with plenty of water (5, 9).
- Put more fruits and vegetables on your plate. In general, fruits and vegetables are low in calories and fat, helping you fill your stomach up on less calories. Beware of dishes with added fat such as fried vegetables and casseroles loaded with extra calories and fat.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Pace or walk while talking on the phone, you'll be too distracted to realize you're burning calories.

Other habits you can change may take a little more effort, but will be worth it are:

- Increase your fiber. Select high-fiber foods like whole grains, beans, fruits and vegetables. Fiber helps manage weight by increasing feelings of fullness with fewer calories and keeping blood sugar steady to relieve frequent hunger.
- Learn to stop eating when you are full. If you aren't hungry, don't eat, especially in front of the television.
- Take a dance, aerobic or sports class through the university or at the recreational center
- Count your calories or estimate them.
- Make an appointment with the dietitian at the Health Center. She can help set up goals, determine how many calories you need to cut out, and make a specific weight-loss plan for you.

How to Lose Weight While Eating at UNT

At UNT Dining Services, we want to be able to assist students and staff with their health goals, including losing weight. One way we can be of assistance is through the foods we serve. All of the cafeterias serve items called "lite" items, for example, Mean Greens at Maple serves

the most lite entrees and desserts. To help students and staff identify lite items, they are denoted with the symbol: £ on the nutrient cards and on the menu. This means that the entrée has less than 300 calories and also less than 10 grams of fat. Choosing these items is healthier for everybody, but can especially be helpful to those who are trying to reduce the amount of calories they eat. Many of the desserts served at Mean Greens are called “mini” or “bites.” Although the item may not have the lite symbol beside it (generally this symbol is for entrees only), they contain less calories than their counterparts because the serving size is smaller, thereby reducing the calories and fat grams per serving.

If you want to know specific details of an item, you can look for its nutrition card that is placed near that item. Here you can find information such as the name of the item, the amount per serving, the calories per serving, the fat grams per serving, other nutrient details, as well as symbols that denote if the item contains an allergen. For an image of the nutrition cards (labels) you can see the dining services website for more detail; just click on the “nutrition” tab.

Another way Dining Services wants to assist students and staff with their health goals is through nutrition education. You can find nutrition information on bulletin boards in every cafeteria, soon to become a nutrition wall. There will be rotating posters communicating a new subject and where to find information for that subject on the bulletin boards/nutrition walls. Also, refer to our website for information. As always, if you need further counseling, contact our office or the dietitian at the Health Center.

At UNT Dining Services, we are here to serve our customers. If you have suggestions on how we can help you with your goal in being a healthier person, please feel free to send us a comment on our website. We want to be a part of the solution in getting America fitter and healthier by offering healthier food options and educating our customers.

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