

Healthy weight

Understanding weight management

For many people it is all too easy to put on weight - everything they eat seems to "turn to fat". The truth is you put on weight when you eat and drink more calories than your body can use in everyday physical activities.



People can also put on too much weight, or become too thin, because they have emotional problems. Eating too much or too little is a common response to anxiety, loneliness or depression. In these circumstances it is best to try and solve the underlying problem first.

In the vast majority of cases being overweight is caused by eating too much, eating the wrong type of foods (foods with high fat or high sugar content) and taking too little exercise. Remember alcohol is also very high in calories and can contribute a great deal to your weight.

Why does your weight matter?

Being overweight is not an illness in itself but it does put extra stress on your heart (being one stone overweight is equivalent to carrying seven bags of sugar around all day). It also increases your risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes. But equally important, those extra pounds also make you feel tired, less fit and less attractive.

What is a healthy weight?

Traditionally, weight has been evaluated using BMI, which stands for Body Mass Index. It is a number that shows your body weight in relation to your height, to establish whether you are carrying too much weight for your height. Whilst BMI gives a reasonably accurate evaluation for the majority of people, those people with more athletic or muscular

builds (i.e. those who have more muscle than the average person) can be overestimated because muscle weighs more than fat.

Excess weight, as measured by BMI, is not the only risk to your health. Of more concern in terms of your health is how much of your body weight is made up of fat. The level of body fat, rather than just your total weight, is critical to your health. Your level of body fat also affects your appearance and body shape so understanding your body fat levels is just as important as knowing your BMI.

Understanding your body fat percentage

Our bodies are physically made of fat, water and lean body mass (bone, muscle, organ tissue, blood and everything else). The real issue for health, and our appearance, is not whether we are too large or too thin, but what proportion of our body weight is made up of fat rather than lean body mass.

A certain amount of fat is essential to bodily functions – fat regulates body temperature, cushions and insulates organs and tissues and is the main form of the body's energy storage. But too much body fat is hazardous to your health and your body shape. Too little body fat can also be a health hazard.

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Understanding weight management contd.

Body fat can be assessed using a body fat analyser, but a simple method for keeping a check on your body fat levels is to check your waist size. Your waist size is very important, as where you carry fat on your body is also critical to your health.

We store fat under the skin, and also around the vital organs in our abdomen. We know that this fat around the abdomen causes more health problems than, say, fat carried on the bottom or thighs. Having a large amount of tummy fat around the waist makes you more likely to develop heart problems, diabetes and high blood pressure; it also increases your risk of stroke and slows down your metabolism. This is why scientists now believe, that when it comes to your health, your waist measurement is more important than your BMI.

Check out your waist measurement:

To find your 'true waist', feel for your hipbone on the side of your body. Move upwards until you can feel your bottom rib bone. Halfway between the top of your hipbone and your bottom rib is your 'true waist'. For most people this is where their tummy button or navel is.

To keep your waist in the recommended range it is essential to make permanent dietary changes. In practice this means following the guidelines for a healthy diet. Losing weight in a healthy way, by gradually changing your lifestyle, is the easiest way to lose inches and it's the only way to permanently keep the weight off.

Why exercise?

Exercise not only burns up calories (so you don't have to restrict your eating so much), it also tones up your body so that you use up more calories even when you are resting. It also helps control your appetite – you may feel that you are eating more but, relative to the amount of calories you are using, you will actually be eating less.

Exercise doesn't need to be vigorous for weight control. In fact moderate intensity exercise is more effective. The body uses two types of fuel for exercise – fat for long, slow bouts of exercise and carbohydrate stored in the muscles for emergencies, when the body needs energy quickly and vigorously. So moderate, steady exercise is best for burning fat – this is the equivalent to a long brisk walk.

	Your health is at risk if you have a waist size of OVER:	Your health is at high risk if you have a waist size of OVER:
Men	94cm (37 Inches)	102cm (40 Inches)
Women	80cm (31.5 Inches)	88cm (34.5 Inches)
Asian Men		90cm (35.5 Inches)
Asian Women		80cm (31.5 Inches)

What can you do?

Losing inches off your waist by dieting isn't easy. It can be hard to stick to 'draconian' diets as you often don't eat enough to keep you healthy – that's why you often feel tired and lethargic. So, whatever you do, don't turn to crash diets, appetite suppressants, or any other fads.

You need to view your weight loss as a long term goal. A lot of 'crash dieters' lose a lot of weight to meet a specific goal (e.g. going on holiday) and then once achieved go back to their old eating habits. That's why the weight is soon regained.

