

# Weight Management



# Choose a Healthy Weight

Everyday choices define lifestyle and can significantly affect body weight. Being too fat or too thin increases the likelihood that health problems will develop.

Small daily choices may seem insignificant, but when they are repeated for months and years, their influence is substantial. For example, it's been estimated that about 53 percent of the diseases, disabilities, and deaths of adult Americans are a result of individual habits. By contrast, environment carries a 19 percent influence; heredity has an 18 percent influence; and medical care has a 10 percent influence.

## What is a healthy weight?

This question can only be answered with general guidelines as researchers continue to develop more precise ways to describe healthy weight. In the best of all worlds, what you weigh equals what you would like to weigh, as well as how much you "should" weigh. In the real world, it's more important to identify and accept what is most reasonable for you.

A healthy weight is one you can maintain by sensible eating habits and exercise, while avoiding chronic health risks. A healthy lifestyle will help you maintain your individual healthy weight.

## Choosing a healthy weight

Whether your weight is "healthy" depends on how much of your weight is fat, where in your body the fat is located, and whether you have weight-related medical problems, such as high blood pressure, or a family history of such problems.

## Height/weight tables are the traditional measure

The first recommended weight for height tables became available in the 1940's. They have been revised periodically as health experts have struggled with the concept of acceptable weights.

Height-weight tables are controversial. Today, nutritionists and dietitians recommend that they be used only as a guide. The tables offer a broad range of recommended weights based on your age and height. They allow for differences in muscle and bone according to sex.

### Suggested Weights for Adults

Height <sup>1</sup>	Weight in pounds <sup>2</sup>	
	19 - 34 years	35 years and older
5'0"	<sup>3</sup> 97-128	108-138
5'1"	101-132	111-143
5'2"	104-137	115-148
5'3"	107-141	119-152
5'4"	111-146	122-157
5'5"	114-150	126-162
5'6"	118-155	130-167
5'7"	121-160	134-172
5'8"	125-164	138-178
5'9"	129-169	142-183
5'10"	132-174	146-188
5'11"	136-179	151-194
6'0"	140-184	155-199
6'1"	144-189	159-205
6'2"	148-195	164-210
6'3"	152-200	168-216
6'4"	156-205	173-222
6'5"	160-211	177-228
6'6"	164-216	182-234

<sup>1</sup>Without shoes.

<sup>2</sup>Without clothes.

<sup>3</sup>The higher weights generally apply to men, who tend to have more muscle and bone; the lower weights more often apply to women, who have less muscle and bone.

Source: Adapted from National Research Council. 1989.

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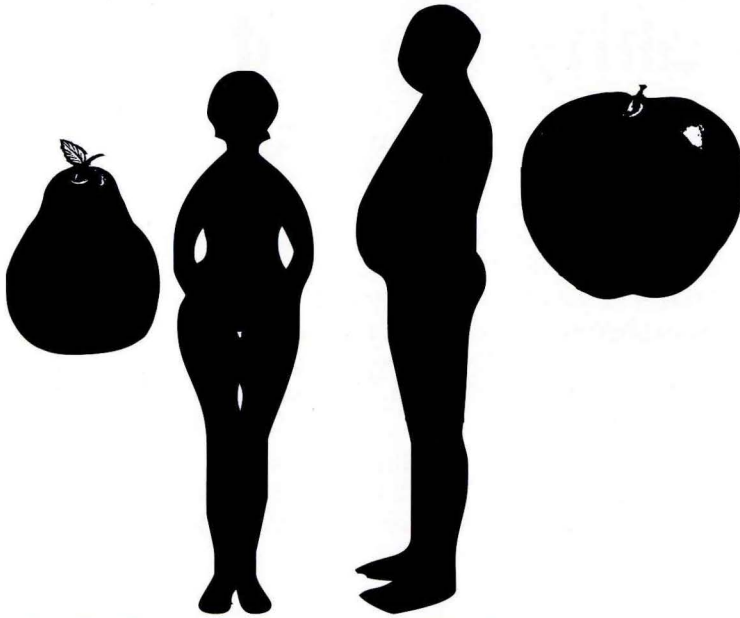
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### Body shape is as important as weight

Where excess fat is carried affects not only appearance, but also total health.

Extra weight that settles about the waist (apple-shaped body—usually males) presents a higher risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes.

Current research says that when extra fat is carried on the hips and thighs (pear-shaped body—usually females), the individual probably doesn't have any greater health risks than people who aren't overweight.

For an accurate description of your

body shape, experts recommend the hip-waist ratio.

This calculation uses your waist and hip measurements to determine a number that can be compared to a standard that is linked with health risks (See box).

***They are as sick that survive with too much as they that starve with nothing.***

—William Shakespeare in *Merchant of Venice*

### Total health affects weight

Medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke are related to weight. These chronic diseases may strongly suggest that your weight should be on the lower end of the height-weight chart.

### You may not need to lose weight if

- You are in generally good health and feel vigorous,
- You have normal values for blood sugar, blood pressure, triglyceride and cholesterol levels, and
- Your hip-waist ratio is below the comparable standard.

### What about being too thin?

In the United States, being too thin is a less common problem. But it can be serious when linked with anorexia nervosa and/or with osteoporosis in women. It also has been linked to an increased risk for early death in both women and men.

### Obesity has consequences

Body weight is an obvious example of the consequences of specific actions.

Although obesity does not always guarantee poor health, excess body weight is a health risk for many Americans—especially older adults.

Severe overweight increases the risk for

- high blood pressure;
- high blood cholesterol;
- diabetes;
- the diseases associated with these risks;
- gallbladder disease;
- types of cancer, such as in the breast;

### Here's how to determine your hip-waist ratio:

1. Measure the number of inches around your waist and around your hips at their fullest point.  
waist \_\_\_\_\_  
hips \_\_\_\_\_
2. Divide the waist measurement by hip measurement.  
waist / hips = \_\_\_\_\_
3. Compare answer to standard  
men = 0.95  
women = 0.8

If your answer is higher than the standard, you are at greater risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes.

- sleep apnea; and
- osteoarthritis.

These risks can increase health costs. Obesity, for example, represents 19 percent or \$22.2 billion of the total spent annually on health care costs related to cardiovascular disease in the U.S.

### What is obesity?

Physicians and weight management specialists make a distinction between obesity and overweight.

**Obesity** is an abnormally high proportion of body fat—usually 20 percent or more above a healthy weight—resulting in a significant impairment of health.

**Overweight** is an increase in body weight above a set standard in relation to height, usually 10 to 19 percent above acceptable weight.

### What causes obesity?

The medical community is continually learning new facts about obesity. Currently, the most important factors include

- heredity,
- overeating,
- metabolic rate,
- decreased physical activity without an appropriate reduction in food intake, and
- certain prescribed medications.

Of these six factors, individuals have the most control of overeating and decreased physical activity.

**Heredity** has been established as a distinct factor in obesity, but that fact cannot be used as an excuse for not controlling food intake or not exercising. Individuals who have an inherited tendency toward obesity must work harder to maintain a healthy weight.

**Eating too much** is a significant contributor to overweight, though not for all individuals. Psychological and behavioral factors influence eating behaviors. The satisfaction from food can be influenced by certain hormones, nervous impulses, and absorbed nutrients. Obese individuals do not always eat more than normal weight individuals. A lack of physical activity may be a factor, in addition to metabolism, hormones, and nervous impulses.

**Metabolism** is the sum of chemical changes occurring in body tissue. The basal metabolic rate (BMR) is the measure of energy used for running the body's

essential metabolic machinery and for maintaining body temperature. It is measured when a person is at complete rest, before rising in the morning, and 12 hours or more after the last meal.

Most individuals maintain a relatively stable weight through the adult years, even though their food intake varies. Body weight appears to stabilize at a specific set point that is maintained by variation in the metabolic rate in response to food intake. This observation has led to the set point theory which suggests that people cannot maintain their weight below a certain level. The set point theory has not been verified, however. Nor do we yet know the exact way in which the body controls weight level.

**Physical inactivity** without a decrease in food intake can lead to obesity. By contrast, daily exercise is an excellent weight management tool and can lead to weight loss. For example, without changing your normal calorie intake, you can lose about a pound in one month just by walking one extra mile at a brisk pace daily. Continued daily walks can lead to a loss of 10 to 12 pounds in a year.

**Medications** can cause weight gain in some individuals. Examples are drugs prescribed for hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases that may change metabolic rates and decrease energy expenditure levels. Some tranquilizers, antihistamines, and birth control pills cause weight gain. Others can cause weight loss through anorexia. For more information, contact a physician.

### If you need to lose weight, avoid fad diets

Consumers spend about \$5 billion annually on miracle-promising diets which often contribute to health risk. Most fad diets are lacking in essential nutrients, some are dangerous, and most are based on quick water loss rather than fat loss.

Another risk involves the yo-yo effect. Weight lost on a fad diet is likely to return quickly, prompting the individual to try yet another fad diet. The resulting up and down weights prompt a higher blood cholesterol and blood pressure, and can

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***Nutrition is, historically, perhaps the most important contributor to man's successes against disease and disability.***

—J. Michael McGinnis, MD,  
Deputy Assistant Secretary for  
Health

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## How concerned should you be?

Compare your answers on these weight-related health risk factors.

My weight is \_\_\_\_\_. Compared to the range suggested for my age and height, this is  
\_\_\_ too high  
\_\_\_ right on  
\_\_\_ below suggested weight

My hip-waist ratio is \_\_\_\_\_. Compared to the suggested standard of 0.95 for males and 0.8 for females, this is  
\_\_\_ too high  
\_\_\_ right on  
\_\_\_ below acceptable range

My blood pressure is \_\_\_\_\_. Check with your physician.  
\_\_\_ too high  
\_\_\_ right on  
\_\_\_ low, but acceptable to physician

My triglyceride level is \_\_\_\_\_. Compared to the suggested maximum of 150 mg, this is  
\_\_\_ too high  
\_\_\_ right on  
\_\_\_ lower; congratulations!

My total serum cholesterol is \_\_\_\_\_. Compared to the suggested maximum of 210 mg, this is  
\_\_\_ too high  
\_\_\_ right on  
\_\_\_ lower; congratulations!

My total cholesterol/high-density lipoprotein cholesterol is \_\_\_\_\_. Compared to the recommended standard of 4.97 for males and 4.44 for females, this is  
\_\_\_ too high  
\_\_\_ right on  
\_\_\_ lower; congratulations!

I exercise \_\_\_\_ minutes \_\_\_\_ times weekly. Compared to the recommendation for a minimum of 30 minutes 4 times per week, this is  
\_\_\_ much less than recommended  
\_\_\_ about what is recommended  
\_\_\_ considerably more than recommended

My goal: \_\_\_\_\_

lead to fat tissue replacing lean tissue.

In fact, the harmful effects of such yo-yo dieting may be equally as risky as remaining obese.

Individuals whose weight changes often or who have large weight changes are 25 to 100 percent more likely to be victims of heart disease and premature death than those who maintain a stable weight—even if that weight is higher than considered healthy.

The newest weight management programs are very different from the older, stricter programs which focused on drastic cuts in calories, offered little variety and were very hard to maintain over a lifetime.

## Maintaining a healthy weight requires daily attention

We now know that weight management is a lifetime commitment. Instead of calorie counting skills, it requires

- eating a variety of foods,
- choosing low-fat foods,
- eating high-calorie, high-fat foods less often, and
- exercising regularly.

Weight management—especially when weight loss is required—is easiest to achieve when changes in eating and exercising habits are made gradually. Focusing on moderation, not deprivation, increases the likelihood of success.

## For more information

These publications are available from county extension offices.

*Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. 3rd edition. H&G 232

*Eat for Health*, NCR 454

*Exercise for Health*, NCR 453

*Watch Your Fat Intake*, NCR 456

*USDA's Food Guide Pyramid*, H&G 252

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