

Health Facts *for you*

Weight Management: Frequently Asked Questions

Do you need to attain an ideal weight to be healthy?

There is a large amount of scientific data that tells us a modest weight loss of 5 to 10% can be good for your health. High blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol and sleep problems as well as other common health concerns can be improved and even controlled with modest weight loss.

What is a good diet to follow?

For many of us, a diet means we deprive ourselves of food and push ourselves to be on a rigid eating and exercise program. This often implies a short-term change, which takes only a minor effort over a short amount of time. What is really needed is a change in lifestyle. This means making slow changes in eating and working out that can be maintained over the long term. It involves starting new habits and it will take a bit of hard work to make these new habits a part of your daily life.

How much weight am I likely to lose?

Most people have high hopes that make it hard to measure success. More people are able to lose, and maintain, a 10% weight loss than a 30% weight loss. Do not forget that the body seems to defend its weight. But if you make changes that you can maintain in your eating and working out habits, you will likely lose weight.

Weight change rarely occurs at the same rate over time. There will be weeks when your weight will not change even with your best efforts. You can even expect your weight to increase at times. This occurs mainly with changes in your routine such as a vacation, a birthday or a holiday party. A small amount of weight gain is a minor setback in the scheme of a long-term plan or goal.

Try not to be too concerned about weight gain or the lack of progress. We often expect too much of ourselves. What matters is what your weight *is* today, compared with what your weight *was* when you started.

If I increase exercise will I lose weight?

Many people report losing less weight than expected through programs that focus on working out alone. Most studies show that a “working out only” weight loss plan results in an average loss of 4 to 6 pounds. This is good because chances are that the pounds lost are from fat. But, in order to lose more, you have to combine eating less with moving more. Eat less to take off the pounds, move more to keep the pounds from coming back over the long run.

Exercise has many helpful benefits such as better moods, and energy level. It will also help to improve muscle tone, cardiovascular fitness, and blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Working out is a habit. If you are just starting to exercise, keep in mind that getting in the habit is more vital than what you do and how much you do. If it takes you weeks or even months to get into the habit of walking 4 to 5 days a week for 30 to 45 minutes, that is OK. Regular exercise is a must in order to obtain better health and long-term weight goals.

What about all the diets I read about?

Any claims that you can lose weight with ease are false. Very low-calorie diets are very risky. They should be done only under medical advice and support. They can deny you of needed nutrients and could be harmful.

Fad diets rarely have any long lasting effects. Sudden and major changes in your eating patterns are hard to sustain over time. Also, so-called “crash” diets often send people into a cycle of quick weight loss, followed by a “rebound” weight gain once normal eating resumes. Most experts agree that for weight loss to last, you must change your lifestyle and behavior.

How do I get started?

- Focus your efforts on working out. Find a work out program that you are most likely to stick with.
- Work to remove (not eliminate) certain foods from your diet. Limit high fat foods and high sugar drinks.
- Eat regular meals. Be sure to include breakfast in your eating plan. Think about eating smaller portion sizes.
- Be aware of your problem areas (emotional eating, stress eating and social eating).
- Accept slow but steady rates of weight loss progress.
- Find ways to stay on track despite roadblocks such as an injury, work, and family demands.
- Enlist support of helpful people around you. Recruit people who have healthy lifestyles to support you in these healthy changes.
- If you have more than 20 pounds to lose, consult with your health care provider. Ask about meeting with a dietitian and a work out expert to support you during this time.

Efforts should be focused on both exercise AND nutrition for long term progress.

Do you need help trying to manage your weight in relation to your other medical problems? Would you like a program suited to your lifestyle? Are you having trouble knowing how to begin? Is it hard for you to stay motivated? Then we encourage you to meet with a registered dietitian at any of the sites listed below.

Nutrition Clinic Room L33
University Station
2880 University Avenue
Madison, WI 53705
(608) 263-5012

Nutrition Clinic Room 1296
UW Health West Clinic
451 Junction Road
Madison, WI 53717
(608) 265-7526

Nutrition Clinic Room 2085
UW Health East Clinic
5249 East Terrace Drive
Madison, WI 53718
(608) 265-0963