



# Healthy Steps

## For Healthy Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for reducing the risk of such diseases and health problems as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and triglycerides, arthritis, gall bladder disease, gynecologic problems, some cancers, and even lung problems. Weight can affect a person's self-esteem. Excess weight is highly visible and evokes some powerful reactions, however unfairly, from other people and from the people who possess the excess weight. Underweight is also linked with heart problems, lowered resistance to infection, chronic fatigue, anemia, depression and other illnesses.

Your "healthy" weight is likely to be quite different from anyone else's. A variety of factors influence your weight including your genes, which play a role in determining your body size and shape, as well as physical activity, and what you eat. Whether your weight is "healthy" depends on where your body fat is located, how much of your weight is fat, and whether you have weight related health problems such as diabetes or high blood pressure.

The following guidelines can help you judge if your weight is healthy:

- **Body Shape**  
Having more of a pear-shaped than apple-shaped body indicates that even if you are over your "healthy" weight, your health may not be at risk. If you are apple-shaped with more body fat on your upper body around your abdomen, you are more at risk for serious illness than your pear-shaped coworker who carries excess fat on the lower body, buttocks, and thighs.
- **Body Mass Index**  
Body mass index or BMI is the relationship between height and weight that determines whether someone is of average weight, overweight or obese. The body mass index is calculated by dividing your weight in kilograms by your height in meters squared. An online calculator and chart have been developed to help people determine their BMI.
- **BMI Calculator** <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/bmicalc.htm>
- **BMI table** [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/bmi\\_tbl.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/bmi_tbl.htm)

You Should Consider Losing Weight If:

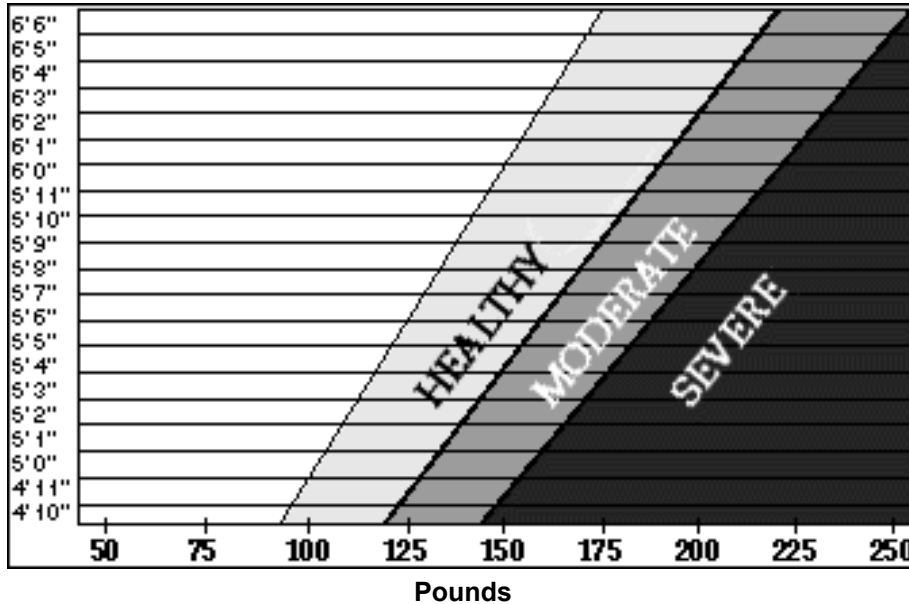
- Your BMI is 30 or greater
- Your BMI is 25 and you have two or more weight-related health problems
- Your waist circumference exceeds 40 inches (for men) or 35 inches (for women) and you have two or more weight-related health problems.

The chart offers some guidelines for determining a reasonable weight range based on height. Because muscle and bone weigh more than fat, the higher weights in the range typically apply to

those with more muscle and a larger frame. People with less muscle and a smaller frame will fall at the lower end of the range. Weights above and below the ranges are associated with increased incidence of disease and disability.

### Are you a healthy weight?

#### Height



Source: US Department of Agriculture, US Department of Health and Human Services. *Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, 4th ed., 1995.

The following are **Healthy Steps** that can help each of us to manage his or her own body weight in realistic fashion.

The **Healthy Steps** are not in a particular order although some of the steps naturally harmonize with others. They were selected because current research suggests these steps may be the most helpful to American adults in selecting habits and behaviors that will lead to healthy weights throughout life.

1. **Exercise** - When you exercise regularly food energy can be used for the activity rather than stored as fat. Research shows even moderate physical activity produces healthful benefits. Walking, bicycling, and light jogging are exercise that prepares the heart and lungs to work more efficiently. Activities that strengthen muscles help build and maintain lean body mass which produces a lean, trim look.

Exercise boosts your morale. People who are active feel good about themselves. Rather than stimulate appetite, exercise helps to regulate appetite so that it matches energy needs.

To increase your physical activity, determine how active you are now. Identify times of the day when you could add more exercise. Even parking farther out in a parking lot as you go to work or do your shopping increases activity. Squeeze in walks during lunch

hours or after an evening meal. If you've been a non-exerciser until now, start gently and slowly. "No pain, no gain" doesn't apply here. It's most important that you enjoy your chosen activity so you will continue to do it.

2. **Talk positively to yourself** - Too often we compare our own body sizes and shapes to others, forgetting that their life circumstances are different from our own. Positive self-talk allows us to identify aspects of ourselves that we like and appreciate. When you focus on your likable traits and grow to appreciate them you will have less time to belittle personal characteristics that really don't affect your self worth anyway. Positive self talk encourages positive thinking and positive actions.
3. **Set goals** - Charting a course for yourself by defining the direction in which you will head is a key to success in many phases of life. Set small, achievable goals. Work hard on one or two goals at a time. Once achieved, move to the next goal step. Goals that require you to take action are best.

Setting the right goals is an important first step. Most people trying to lose weight focus on just that one goal: weight loss. However, the most productive areas to focus on are the dietary and exercise changes that will lead to that long-term weight change. Successful weight managers are those who select two or three goals at a time that they are willing to take on, that meet the following criteria of useful goals:

Effective goals are 1) specific; 2) attainable; and 3) forgiving (less than perfect). "Exercise more" is a commendable ideal, but it's not specific. "Walk five miles everyday" is specific and measurable, but is it attainable if you're just starting out? "Walk 30 minutes every day" is more attainable, but what happens if you're held up at work one day and there's a thunderstorm during your walking time another day? "Walk 30 minutes, five days each week" is specific, attainable, and forgiving. In short, a great goal!

4. **Reward yourself** - Give yourself a reward when you achieve a goal or do something that has required effort. Rewards can be small gifts to yourself, allowing special times for yourself or with others, or going to special events. The important point is to let rewards serve as a reminder that you have been successful. Rewards are best when they closely follow your accomplishment.
5. **Choose low fat** - Ounce for ounce, fat yields more energy than either carbohydrate or protein. The body also prefers to burn carbohydrate for energy and saves fat for storage. A high carbohydrate diet will satisfy energy needs with less chance of excess fat storage. High fat diets, on the other hand, lead to excess energy that is stored as fat. Moderate to low fat intakes are between 40 to 65 grams of fat each day if your energy needs are between 1,200 to 2,000 kilocalories. You can work toward lower fat intakes if you:
  - select lean meat, fish or poultry and use meat substitutes such as dry beans
  - eat low fat or nonfat dairy products
  - limit use of high fat spreads, sauces and gravies

6. **Watch portion sizes** - There are no forbidden foods but sometimes the amount you eat can weigh you down. Controlling portion sizes of foods is a step we often forget. Next time you eat, check your serving sizes. If your serving sizes are consistently larger than standard servings, take that into account when you eat. (portion sizes for pasta or cooked vegetables is a tennis ball cut in half; meat, fish, or poultry is about the size of a deck of cards; and portion size of leafy vegetables is about the size of a tennis ball)
7. **Assess your own healthy weight** - Too much emphasis has often been placed on fitting into a certain weight category or wearing a certain clothing size. Society's misplaced emphasis on thinness has encouraged some people to use supernatural efforts to maintain extremely low body weights.

The human body requires some body fat to protect internal organs and store energy. Excess fat, however, taxes the heart and lungs. If the excess fat is carried around your abdomen, there is greater risk of disease. If you can pinch more than an inch or your waist measure is equal to or greater than your hip measurement, trim your weight.

8. **Complete a behavior inventory** - One of the most useful steps in managing weight is to complete a behavior inventory. Check your habits for snacking, eating in response to hunger, and preparing foods.

Snacks can be a part of your daily food plan but they need to be planned carefully. Snack choices make a big difference in fat intake if you select high fat snacks.

Determine how hungry you are when you eat. Delay eating if you are not really hungry.

Changing the way you go about eating can make it easier to eat less without feeling deprived. It takes 15 or more minutes for your brain to get the message you've been fed. Slowing the rate of eating can allow satiety (fullness) signals to begin to develop by the end of the meal. Eating lots of vegetables can also make you feel fuller. Another trick is to use smaller plates so that moderate portions do not appear meager. Changing your eating schedule, or setting one, can be helpful, especially if you tend to skip, or delay, meals and overeat later.

9. **Choose a variety of foods** - Build your daily food choices around the Food Guide Pyramid. Choose a variety of foods from each group and eat from all of the groups. Eat within the recommended number of servings for each food group to meet your nutritional needs. More on this and a food guide pyramid can be found at: <http://www.eatright.com/feature/0902.html>

By "watching your portion size" and "choosing low fat" you will develop food habits that will last a lifetime and will help you to manage your weight.