

Weight-Loss Diets

Why do I need to lose weight if I am overweight?

Being overweight increases your risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. If you are overweight, losing just 5 to 10% of your weight and keeping it off lowers your risk for developing most of these diseases.

Your health care provider can give you a good sense of whether you have an increased risk of health problems because of your weight.

What can I do to lose weight?

Losing weight requires a change in behavior that almost always involves:

- a better understanding of your own health
- healthy eating habits
- a plan for rewards for following your program
- an increase in regular physical activity.

Diets for losing weight involve controlling the amount and types of food you eat. This most often means eating fewer calories and avoiding some foods. A weight-loss diet needs to provide adequate nutrition and a good variety of foods as well as a reduction in calories.

What is most effective is a gradual change in eating and physical activity habits that you can continue for the rest of your life. The best diet is one that helps you lose weight slowly but steadily, so you can maintain your ideal weight after you have reached your goal. Ask your health care provider for a safe, healthy, effective weight-loss program.

What foods should I choose to lose weight?

Keep a food diary. As soon as you eat or drink, write it down. It may be helpful to use a small pocket diary. Seeing what you eat and drink will help you examine your eating patterns and food habits.

To lose weight in a healthy manner, follow these guidelines:

- Drink at least six 8-ounce glasses of water each day.
- Choose unlimited amounts of vegetables and salads.
- Choose:
 - lean meats, poultry, and fish
 - baked or broiled meat, fish, and poultry
 - salad dressing containing little or no oil.

- Choose regular but limited amounts of:
 - low-fat or skim milk, cheeses, and yogurts
 - legumes (lentils, peas, and beans)
 - unrefined carbohydrates (whole wheat bread, whole grain cereals without sugar)
 - raw fruits.
- Significantly limit how much you eat of the following:
 - refined carbohydrates (sugar) and foods containing sugar
 - refined grain products such as white rice and white flour.
- Avoid:
 - saturated fats such as butter, margarine, and fat on meats
 - other foods that contain fats, such as pastries, cakes, and cheese
 - fried foods
 - processed meats
 - alcoholic beverages.

To have a balanced diet, be sure to choose a variety of foods from the basic food groups:

- dairy
- meat and other protein
- vegetables
- fruit
- bread and cereal.

What are calories?

A calorie is a measurement used to express the energy value of food. Your body burns calories to use for basic body functions. Proteins, carbohydrates, and fats contain calories and produce energy. To lose weight, reduce the calories in the food you eat (without giving up nutrition). Increase the number of calories you use in physical activity.

Eating 500 calories a day less than you need to maintain your present weight can result in losing 1 pound a week. One to one and a half pounds (2 pounds maximum) is the ideal amount to lose in a week. If you lose more than that each week, you begin to lose muscle rather than fat.

Most weight reduction diets suggest 1200 to 1500 calories a day for women and 1500 to 1800 calories a day for men. Ask your health care provider or dietitian to help you determine how many calories you need a day.

You must eat a minimum quantity of calories in appropriate food or your body will shut down its metabolism in an effort to survive the lean time. This happens when people go on "starvation diets." The body's survival response prevents them from losing weight.

What are some of the popular diets?

There are several popular diets. Some may be dangerous. Broad categories of popular diets are:

- high-protein diets
- specific food diets
- calorie-conscious commercial programs.

High-protein diets result in a quick initial loss of weight. These diets allow unlimited amounts of high-protein foods, but little or no carbohydrates. Examples include the Atkins Diet, Cambridge Diet (The University Diet), Herbalife Diet Plan, Stillman Diet, and Scarsdale Diet.

- The low-carbohydrate Atkins diet is being reexamined by several medical research studies at this time. It may be effective for some people. There are no long-term studies yet to show the effects of being on the Atkins diet for several years.
- The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) has reported cases of acute illness from the Cambridge diet requiring hospitalization. A warning has been added to the product label.
- The Herbalife diet plan may cause diarrhea, nausea, heavy sweating, headaches, and cramps.
- The Stillman diet does not include the 5 basic food groups. It provides only small amounts of vitamins A and C, thiamine, and iron.
- In the Scarsdale Diet there is little iron, vitamin A, calcium, and riboflavin because the diet limits milk, bread, and cereals. It can lead to dehydration because fluids are limited to coffee, tea, and water. (Coffee and tea have diuretic effects, which means you may lose more water than you consume.)

Specific food diets are based on food combinations. These diets don't count calories, are monotonous, and encourage unrealistic eating habits. You may develop vitamin and mineral deficiencies after a few days on one of these diets. Examples of these diets are the Mayo (or grapefruit) diet, the Beverly Hills diet, and high-carbohydrate diets.

- The Mayo diet is based on the belief that grapefruit causes weight loss by causing fat to be burned faster. One of the problems is that the diet is high in saturated fats and cholesterol.
- The Beverly Hills Diet is low in protein, vitamins, and minerals such as iron, zinc, calcium, and magnesium.
- High-carbohydrate diets (for example, Jane Fonda, Pritikin, Bloomingdale's Eat to Succeed) are based on high-carbohydrate, high-fiber foods. Some are balanced but others are not.

Calorie-conscious commercial programs and weight-loss clinics offer group support and motivation for the dieter, a wide variety of foods, and a calorie intake between 500 and 1500 a day. These programs are often expensive and should not be used without

medical supervision. Some programs can provide excellent support in changing bad eating habits and maintaining a program over time.

Very low calorie diets and total fasting (eating less than 500 calories a day) are potentially fatal and require medical supervision.

What if I can't stop overeating?

If you compulsively overeat, Overeaters Anonymous may help. The program is free. Write or call:

Overeaters Anonymous

Phone: 505-891-2664

Web site: <http://www.overeatersanonymous.org>

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