# Weight Management

## How Does Carrying Extra Weight Affect Us?

Obesity affects more than 2 in 5 adults, costing nearly 425 billion in 2023 alone. Being overweight or obese is not only costly, but can significantly affect your health and lead to the development of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and certain types of cancers. Most people worry about the weight they can feel under the skin, called subcutaneous fat. However, the most dangerous form is visceral fat which sits around our organs like the heart and liver. Having too much visceral fat can raise cholesterol levels, increase blood pressure, and increase risk for diabetes. Carrying too much weight around our midsection can make it harder for our bodies to respond to the hormone insulin, which controls our blood sugar levels. Having high levels of glucose in the bloodstream can damage your arteries, leading to increased risk of heart and circulatory diseases.

## How Weight Gain Affects the Heart

Excess weight around the middle can lead to a build up of a fatty material called plaque in the arteries-the blood vessels that carry blood to your organs. If too much plaque builds up, the arteries that carry blood to your heart can get clogged or blocked, causing a heart attack. If this occurs in arteries that carry blood to your brain, it can lead to stroke or vascular dementia.

## How Do I Know if I Have Excess Weight or Obesity?

The most common indicator for monitoring our weight status is to measure our BMI, or Body Mass Index. You can do this at home using your height and weight to input into a free BMI calculator online, or have it calculated at most medical facilities. Although BMI is a helpful tool, it does not take into account muscle mass, so if you are an extra muscular person, you might see your BMI fall in the overweight or obese category without actually having a weight problem. BMI measurements fall into these categories based on your number:

- Underweight: BMI below 18.5
- Normal Weight: BMI: 18-24.9
- Overweight BMI: 25-29.9
- Obese Class I BMI: 30-34.9
- Obese Class II BMI: 35-39.9
- Obese Class III BMI: 40+

## Setting a Weight Loss Goal

Once you've determined you would like to lose weight and know your starting point, it's important to set a personal weight loss goal. A reasonable starting point would be to aim for **5-10%** of your total body weight. If you weigh 150 lbs, this would be 7.5-15 lbs. Setting a SMART goal, one that is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound is ideal for setting yourself up for success and building confidence.

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# Tips for Healthy, Manageable Weight Loss

## 1. Choose Nutrient Dense Foods

The types of foods we eat on a regular basis help determine whether we gain or lose weight over time. Nutrient dense foods, or foods that provide more nutrients per calorie, are lower in sugar, fat, sodium and higher in vitamins and minerals. Choosing nutrient dense foods more regularly can help you feel fuller with less calories, which is ideal for weight management. Focus on the majority of your calories coming from nutrient dense foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, yogurt, and legumes versus calorie dense food choices like fried foods, sugar-sweetened beverages, and processed red meat. Some tips for choosing nutrient dense options include:

- Don't drink your calories- Beverages like flavored coffee drinks, juices, sodas, lemonade, energy drinks, Gatorade, and mixed drinks are usually laden with sugar and empty calories. Liquid calories are also less satisfying than solid foods and often provide less nutrients.
- Limit foods high in saturated fat like processed meats and cheeses, fried foods, and butter since fat is a concentrated source of calories.
- Choose lean cuts of meat like fish, chicken, turkey, and lean red meat. Trim visible fat and skin from meats before eating.
- Use lower fat cooking methods such as baking, broiling, roasting, stewing, and steaming. Avoid frying foods.
- Watch out for added fats in condiments such as cheese, butter, mayonnaise, and creamy salad dressings/dips.

## 2. Eat Well Balanced, Portion-Controlled Meals

Eating healthy, well-balanced meals that contain lean protein, healthy fats, and fiber can aid in weight management. Choosing a wide variety of foods is good for your gut health, but make sure to pay attention to portion sizes. Try these serving tips to for a well-portioned plate:

- Fill one quarter of your plate with lean protein-this should equal the size of the palm of your hand. Lean protein can include poultry, fish, lean red meat, eggs, and tofu.
- Fill one quarter of your plate with a carbohydrate source-try to choose whole grain sources with fiber such as quinoa, potatoes/sweet potatoes, legumes, whole grain bread, whole wheat pasta, or brown rice.
- Fill half your plate with non-starchy vegetables-This includes all vegetables that do not include starch such as broccoli, lettuce, greens, tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, mushrooms, green beans, etc.
- Add small portions of fruit or dairy options like yogurt or milk on the side or enjoy between meals for a snack.

## 3. Be Physically Active

Physical activity can help with weight loss and weight maintenance by increasing energy expenditure and burning calories. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity per day. If your goal is to lose weight, aim for closer to 60 minutes per day.

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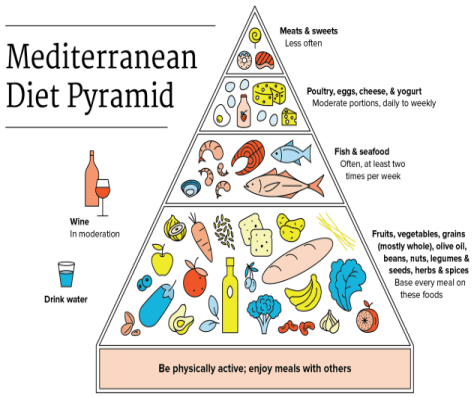
## 4. Focus on Mindful Eating

Mindful eating involves slowing down and paying attention to how food makes you feel. It can help distinguish between physical and emotional hunger and bring awareness to disordered eating patterns. Mindful eating also focuses on utilizing all your senses to fully experience and enjoy the food choices you make. As we slow down and become more aware of our eating habits, we can begin to implement behavior change. Here are some tips to practice mindful eating:

- Take small bites of food
- Chew each bite well
- Bring focus to how the food looks, tastes, smells, feels
- Put your utensils down between bites and savor the taste of the food
- Pay attention to internal hunger cues that can affect how much we eat
- Take a few deep breaths before or after a meal to calm the nervous system down

## What is the Healthiest Diet?

While no single diet can be considered 'the healthiest' as a blanket statement, there are styles of eating that are used around the world to promote optimal health. What these styles of eating have in common is an emphasis on plant-based meals, lowering intake of sodium and added sugars, and a focus on natural, whole food products with less processed foods often seen in a traditional Western diet. **The Mediterranean Diet** focuses on minimally processed fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, and whole grains. It contains moderate amounts of fish, poultry, yogurt, and cheese. Red meat and added sugars should be limited and olive oil should be the main cooking fat. In addition to being an effective weight loss method, the Mediterranean Diet has also proven to lower risk of diabetes, depression, heart disease, and some forms of cancer. **The DASH Diet** (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) is a similar diet that was designed specifically for heart health. The key features of the DASH Diet are a focus on foods low in cholesterol and saturated fats and high in magnesium, potassium, calcium, and fiber, with little red meat or added sugar. Both of these diets support weight loss, decrease cardiovascular risk, improve hypertension, and provide anti-inflammatory properties. Below is a list of foods commonly eaten in both the Mediterranean and DASH Diet:




- Fatty fish like salmon, tuna, herring, mackerel, sardines, anchovies
- Poultry like chicken, turkey, chicken broth
- Legumes such as beans, lentils, peas, and chickpeas
- Nuts like walnuts, almonds, pistachios, hazelnuts, pine nuts, and chestnuts
- Vegetables such as kale, spinach, tomatoes, eggplant, broccoli, cauliflower, cucumbers, etc
- Fruit like apples, berries, grapes, apricots, pears, dates, figs, stone fruit, pomegranate, oranges, bananas, etc
- Whole grains like quinoa, farro, barley, bulgur, corn, millet, oats, brown rice, whole grain breads and pasta, sourdough and rye
- Healthy fats from olive oil, avocados, nuts, and seeds

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