

## **Education**

### **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:

- making smart choices from every food group: fruits, vegetables, grains, milk products, meat, and fats
- finding a balance between how much food you eat and how much physical activity you do
- getting the most nutrition out of your calories.

If you are trying to lose weight, 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 satisfying foods as well as a reduction in calories.

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

#### **What foods should I choose to lose weight?**

A healthy eating plan is one that:

- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans.
- Includes fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs or egg whites, nuts, and soy foods.
- Is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.

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.

#### **What foods should I limit or avoid?**

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, cream cheese, poultry skin, whole-milk dairy products (including cheese), and fat on meats
- other foods that often contain a lot of fat and trans fats, such as margarine, pastries, cakes, cookies, and snack crackers
- fried foods
- processed meats (they are often high in fat, salt, and preservatives).

If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Moderate drinking means up to 1 drink a day for women and up to 2 drinks for men. A drink equals 12 ounces of regular beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1 and 1/2 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits. Remember that alcoholic beverages have calories but are low in nutritional value.

### What are calories?

A calorie is 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. However, calorie needs can vary a lot depending on your activity level and current weight. Ask your health care provider or dietitian to help you determine how many calories you need a day.

You must eat a minimum number of calories per day 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 are considered to be fad diets and unsafe for the long term, and others are healthy and may be right for you. Remember that there is no one diet that works for everyone. Broad categories of popular diets are:

- high-protein diets
- specific food diets
- balanced nutrition diet plans
- calorie-conscious commercial programs.

**High-protein, low-carbohydrate diets** result in a quick initial loss of weight. Most of these diets allow unlimited amounts of high-protein foods. Carbohydrate content varies but usually is very low at first. The amounts of fat allowed in the diets vary. Diets that emphasize low amounts of saturated fat and move more quickly to adding other food groups back to the diet are healthier.

- The **Atkins Diet** is a high protein, high fat, low-carbohydrate diet. New versions of this diet do discuss the benefits of substituting healthy fats for saturated fats, but they are not emphasized. In recent studies, dieters following the Atkins plan lost more weight in the first 6 months than dieters on a calorie-controlled, low-fat diet. However, the amount of weight lost in the 2 groups after 1 year was about the same. It is not clear if the Atkins diet is better than a calorie-controlled, low-fat diet for maintaining weight loss.
- The **South Beach Diet** is similar to the Atkins diet at first, but it limits saturated fat as well as most carbohydrates (carbs). The first phase is less restrictive than the Atkins plan. It includes many vegetables, nuts, and seeds. The second phase adds back all food groups but with most starches eaten less often. This diet is based on the glycemic index and recommends that most processed grains and some fruits and vegetables be avoided completely.
- The **Stillman Diet** is an extremely restrictive high-protein diet that includes almost no carbs, no added fats, and only the leanest proteins. It lacks many nutrients and can be dangerous.
- The focus of the **Scarsdale Diet** is to eat protein, carbohydrate, and fat in certain percentages (43% protein, 34.5% carb, and 22.5% fat). It is simple to follow because meal plans are mapped out, keeping variety at a

minimum. Although the goal is low fat, it is easy to consume a lot of fat, especially saturated fat.

Research has yet to determine the long-term benefits or risks of high-protein, low-carb diets. Recent studies of people following the Atkins Diet showed that they lowered their triglyceride (unhealthy blood fat) levels and increased their HDL (good cholesterol), despite eating a diet rich in saturated fat. A possible risk is that the diet limits foods (whole grains, fruits, and vegetables) that help reduce the risk for cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and other health conditions.

**Specific food diets** are based on food combinations and considered to be fad diets. 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 grapefruit diet and the cabbage diet.

**Balanced nutrition diet plans** are higher-carbohydrate, low saturated fat diets that more closely follow the 2005 dietary recommends for Americans, the food pyramid, and American Heart and Cancer Society guidelines.

- The **Dean Ornish** and **Pritikin** diet plans are very high in carbohydrate and extremely low in fat. Although these plans can be healthy, they are hard to stick to for a long time.
- The **Mayo Clinic** and the **American Heart** diets are based on high fiber, fewer processed carbohydrates, lean protein foods, and healthy fats in moderation.
- The **Mediterranean Diet** focuses on plant foods, but has very few restrictions. Learning to prepare tasty, small meals is the cornerstone of this plan. Fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts and seeds, and bread (often pita bread), and olive oils are encouraged. Animal proteins such as fish, lean meats, and dairy are included but not emphasized. The healthy foods and smaller portions result in a gradual weight loss.

**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, such as Weight Watchers, 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.

### **How will physical activity help me lose weight?**

In addition to diet, daily walking can help you manage your weight. Start with a comfortable goal: 5, 10, or 15 minutes a day. Walk this amount at least 4 to 7 times a week. Each week add 5 minutes to your time until you have worked up to at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day. Moderate aerobic exercise is generally defined as requiring the energy it takes to walk 2 miles in 30 minutes. Once you have reached the 30-minute goal, you may need to work up to exercising 60 minutes a day to prevent weight gain and 90 minutes a day to lose weight. Invite someone to walk with you, for example, your spouse or a child you've been meaning to spend more time with. Be sure to check with your health care provider before starting your exercise program.

As you walk you will burn calories. By exercising regularly you will also increase your metabolic rate. This means you will be burning more calories for several hours after exercise. If you are unable to walk, ask your health care provider to recommend a different type of exercise.

In addition to helping you lose or maintain your weight, regular physical activity lowers your pulse, blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar. It also increases your energy level and improves your sleep.

### **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.oa.org/index.htm>

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