

# LOSING WEIGHT

**The aim of this factsheet is to help you look at how you can improve your health by focusing on your weight. Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight can reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. If you are overweight just a 5-10% body weight loss will still have health benefits.**

Evidence shows that the best way to lose weight is to make small and sustainable changes to your lifestyle that result in a steady rate of weight loss. To lose weight, we need to change our current habits. This often means eating less and being more active. Alongside a healthier diet, regular physical activity is an essential component of your weight-loss journey. It will help burn extra energy as well as improve your general health and wellbeing.

## Do I need to lose weight?

A healthy weight for your height can be calculated using a measurement called body mass index (BMI). It is split into four categories – underweight, ideal weight, overweight or obese – and uses your weight and height measurements to tell if you're in a healthy weight range or not. It will also give you a guide to how much you need to lose to achieve a healthy weight. The number is calculated by dividing your weight in kilograms by your height in metres squared (m<sup>2</sup>). Ideally, you should aim for a BMI in the healthy weight category (18.5 to 25).

There are various health problems associated with being overweight or obese. These can range from difficulties with daily activities such as breathlessness and joint and back pain through to more serious health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, some types of cancer, gallstones, liver and kidney disease.



BMI	Category
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5 - 25	Healthy Weight Range
25 - 30	Overweight
Over 30	Obese

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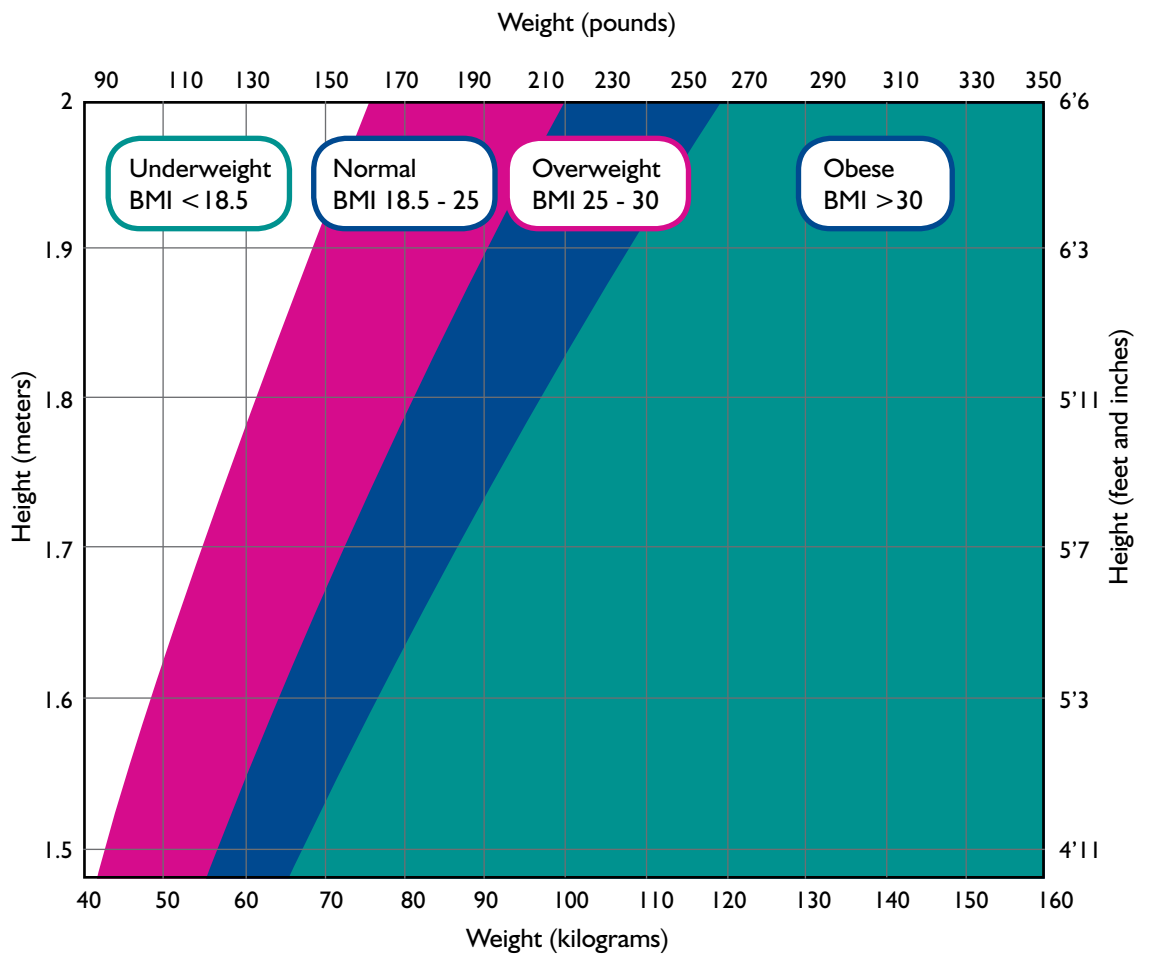
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As well as checking your BMI you should also measure your waist size. While BMI is a good way to tell if you are a healthy weight, your shape can also affect your health risk. Fat around your middle (known as central adiposity) can increase your risk of getting heart disease or developing other long-term health problems. You can work out if you're at an increased risk by simply measuring your waist.

**To measure your waist circumference:**

Find the bottom point of your ribs and the top point of your hip, and measure around your middle at a point mid-way between these. The chart below will give you an indication of how your waist size affects your risk of heart disease and other health conditions.

**You have a higher risk of health problems if your waist size is:**

- More than 80cm (32 inches) if you're a woman
- More than 94cm (37 inches) if you're a man

	Ideal	High Risk	Very High Risk
Women	Less than 80cm (32")	80cm to 88cm (32" to 35")	More than 88cm (35")
Men	Less than 94cm (37")	94cm to 102cm (37" to 40")	More than 102cm (40")

**Your risk of health problems is EVEN HIGHER if your waist size is:**

- More than 102 cm (40 inches) if you're a man
- More than 88cm (35 inches) if you're a woman

Waist circumference can also be a good way to measure weight loss. You will see a reduction in your waist size if you are losing fat.

BMI and waist measurement advice is different if you're South Asian, African-Caribbean, Black African, Chinese or Middle Eastern as you may be at increased risk of some health conditions at a lower BMI than people from white European backgrounds. Advice for these groups is as follows: A BMI of 23 and over and/or a waist measurement of over 90cm (35.5") in men and over 80cm (32") in women is defined as being overweight and at a higher risk of health problems.

**Understanding weight gain**

All foods contain energy which is measured in calories (kcal). Calories are simply the unit of measure (just like miles or kilometres are used to measure distance). Some foods contain more energy (calories) than others. Too much energy leads to weight gain. The best way to lose weight is through balancing the amount of food you take in (energy in) with the amount of physical activity you do (energy out). To stay the same weight, your energy in and energy out should be the same. Weight gain happens when you take in more energy than you need. So, to lose weight you have to eat less and use up more energy by being more physically active.

See the CHSS factsheets 'Healthy Eating' and 'Just Move' for more information.

**What are the benefits of losing weight?**

There is a great deal of evidence that being a healthy weight helps in the prevention and treatment of heart disease. Combining changes to your diet with increasing activity will achieve the best results when trying to lose weight. Losing (and keeping off) just 5-10% of your body weight can provide many health benefits and it is an achievable amount that many people can keep off for good.

**A healthy weight can help to:**

- reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke
- reduce your risk of developing some types of cancer and diabetes
- improve respiratory disease
- lower your blood pressure
- lower your cholesterol
- ease lower back and joint pain

**As well as the health benefits, your reasons for losing weight may be more lifestyle-based such as to:**

- increase your self confidence
- have more energy
- feel better about yourself
- find it easier to be active with your family or play with your children and grandchildren

**Getting started and keeping motivated**

Losing weight can be hard and managing your weight can be a lifelong commitment. Even people who are a healthy weight need to make sensible decisions to maintain their weight. A good starting point might be to maintain your current weight or to achieve 5-10% body weight loss. This means that if you weigh 90kg (14st 11lb) losing 5% of your weight means losing 4.5kg (9lb) or 10% of your body weight would be 9kg (20lb).

Have a goal in mind and make sure you feel positive, supported and prepared for the challenge. Be aware of the habits that have made you gain weight and look for ways to change these in your daily life. Make a plan and set yourself small goals to begin with.

It can be useful to keep a food diary. This can help you identify what changes you need to make and reveal patterns in your eating. As well as noting what you eat and drink during a day, week or month, a food diary can include mood patterns to help highlight triggers that affect your eating habits. It is also useful to include notes such as how do you feel before or after eating? Did you eat because you were hungry or bored? Were you satisfied or overfull before or after eating?

How much	What kind	Time	Where	Alone or with whom	Activity	Mood
1	Chicken & bacon sandwich	12pm	Office	Colleagues	Chatting	Relaxed
1	Apple	12pm	Office	Colleagues	Chatting	Relaxed
2	Chocolate biscuits	3.30pm	Office	Alone	Working on report	Bored
1	Cheeseburger & fries	7pm	Restaurant	Friends	Talking	Happy

Small, realistic goals are achievable and will give you confidence in your ability to lose weight. It can also help to think about goals that are not weight orientated but are something else you would like to achieve such as being able to be more active with your family, fit into your favourite pair of jeans or walk to the shops without getting out of breath. Keep reminding yourself of the reasons for wanting to change.

As you make long-term sustainable lifestyle changes, it can also be hard to stay on track. Tips to help you keep going include:

- Keep a food and activity diary.
- Set clear, achievable goals and once you've achieved these move on to more changes and challenges as you feel ready.
- Give yourself non-food rewards and treats for achieving your goals such as new clothes, trip out etc.
- Look back at what you've achieved so far.
- Consider lifestyle changes for the family as a whole that you can all work on together. You are more likely to make changes when other people are involved and are there to help.
- Don't just focus on your weight; measure success by how tightly clothes fit, how much activity you can do, or how you feel. Some people find that taking 'before and after' photos can help to monitor progress.
- Get support where possible, whether this is a friend, partner, family member, health professional or group.

### **What is the best way of losing weight?**

The best way to lose weight is slowly. A gradual weight loss of around 0.5-1 kg (1-2lb) a week is recommended. If you lose weight too quickly you will be far more likely to put the weight back on again. 'Crash' or 'fad' diets are also harmful because they deprive your body of essential nutrients and can make you feel too tired to exercise. They may also cause fat stores to build up around internal organs, such as your heart and liver, as the body tries to hold onto fat for energy.

If people are overweight, it's usually because they eat and drink more calories than they need. To lose weight it is essential to reduce the number of calories you consume. This means consuming no more than 1,900-2,500kcal a day for most men, or 1,400-2,000kcal a day for most women.

Don't be tempted to weigh yourself more than once a week. Natural shifts in your body weight do occur, such as fluid balance or having a full bladder. Try to weigh yourself at a similar time of day, with the same clothing. Weighing yourself just once a week will give you a more realistic idea of fat loss, in conjunction with your waist circumference measurements.

### **Some tips for losing weight include:**

#### **Follow a healthy eating plan**

- Eat regular meals but plan them in advance as you will find it easier to stick to your calorie allowance and you will also feel less inclined to snack. If you do choose to have a snack, a good guide is less than 150kcal, for example, a piece of fruit, or diet yoghurt (see the healthy-eating factsheet for more snack ideas).

- Drink plenty of water.
- Sip water between meals to help you feel full. Plan your meals and write down everything you eat.
- Read the labels for calories and fat and sugar content.
- Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. Aim for 5 portions a day – at least 2 portions of fruit and 3 portions of vegetables.
- Control your portion size – using a smaller plate can help.
- Take time to enjoy your meals.
- Focus on what you are eating so you can stop when you feel full. Avoid distractions such as the television or computer.
- Rethink your shopping and eating habits. Do not shop when you are hungry.
- Limit your alcohol intake as it is high in calories and it may make you hungry.
- Try not to add extra fat when cooking; instead of frying, try to bake, steam, boil or grill foods.



### Choose the right foods

- Choose low-fat foods such as semi-skimmed milk, low-fat spread and low-fat cheese and yogurts.
- Choose lean cuts of meat; remove the skin from chicken and pour the fat off mince.
- Limit consumption of sugary foods such as biscuits, cakes, sweets and ice cream. Many beverages contain a lot of sugar too, so limit fizzy drinks, fruit juice (1 glass per day) and milkshakes. Diet fizzy drinks can be a useful alternative to regular fizzy drinks. Water and low-fat plain milk are the best choices.

Some examples of food you can swap in order to help you lose weight are as follows:

Foods to avoid	Healthy option
Battered fish	Baked fish
Fatty mince	Lean mince (or with fat poured off)
Mince pie	Sandwich
Cake or muffin	Fresh fruit
Croissant	Brown toast with low-fat spread, jam or honey
Hard cheese	Cottage cheese
Fried rice	Plain rice
Full-fat milk (blue top)	Low-fat milk (red or green top)
Regular fizzy drink	Diet fizzy drink or water



See the CHSS factsheet 'Healthy Eating' for more information.

### Be mindful

Often people squeeze in their meal times between tasks or in front of the television but this can affect how much you really enjoy your food. Eating mindfully is about being aware of what you are eating and how you are eating it. The focus should be on savouring and appreciating your meals rather than eating on the go. This helps to make you feel more satisfied by the foods you choose so that you eat less, which in turn helps you to lose weight more easily and quickly.

### Activity and exercise

- Be as active as you can.
- Move around and stand when you can.
- Find easy ways to fit movement into your daily life. For example, take the stairs instead of the lift, get off the bus earlier than usual, park a bit further away from your destination.
- Slowly build on the amount of activity you do so that it becomes part of your daily routine.
- Plan a walk into your day. Ask a friend or family member to join you and gradually increase the length of time and speed of your walks to burn up more calories.

And lastly, don't give up! We all slip up at times but don't feel guilty and don't give up. Accept it and get back on track.

## Where can I get help to lose weight?

Losing weight is not easy and it needs support and encouragement from health professionals, friends and family alike. Find your own personal motivation and do it for yourself!

Speak to your doctor if you feel that you need help to lose weight.

Some people find it easier to lose weight with other people or by joining a club such as Weight Watchers or Scottish Slimmers. You can attend weekly classes or get support online.

There are various apps available if you have a smart phone to help you monitor your progress; for example, recording your weight on a weekly basis, or working out your BMI. The list below has a few suggestions:



- **NHS BMI tracker:** calculate and track your BMI (body mass index)



- **Weight Watchers:** track your weight, intake and activity



- **My Fitness Pal:** monitor your daily food intake and exercise



- **MyNetDiary:** keep track of meals, exercise, and measurements



- **MapMyFitness:** track your fitness and food intake

## Useful websites

[www.takelifeon.co.uk](http://www.takelifeon.co.uk)

[www.nhs.uk/livewell](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell)

[www.bdaweightwise.com](http://www.bdaweightwise.com)

[www.weightconcern.org.uk](http://www.weightconcern.org.uk)

[www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/healthyweightcalculator](http://www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/healthyweightcalculator)

[www.apps.nhs.uk](http://www.apps.nhs.uk)

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