

Reaching Your Healthy Weight: Taking the First Steps to Success



Congratulations! By reading this you are starting the process of improving your health. Educating yourself about why it is important to maintain a healthy weight—and how to get there—is a great first step.

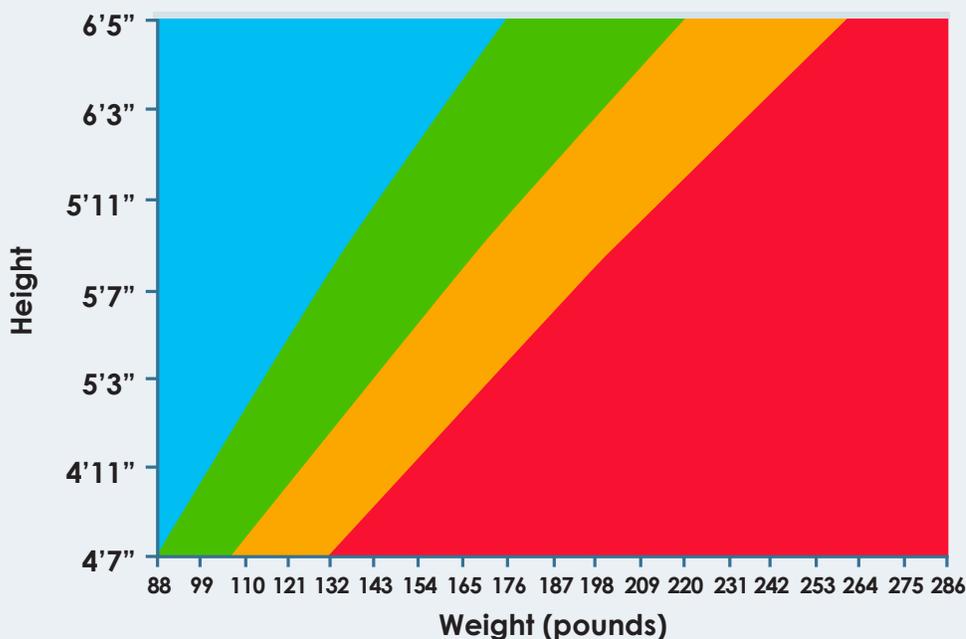
Weight loss is not easy, and it will not happen quickly. Making small but lasting lifestyle changes is the best way to start.

Your doctor or another member of your healthcare team will help you choose a goal weight. Everyone's healthy weight is different and depends on many factors, including height and age.

Calculating your BMI

Your doctor or another member of your healthcare team may talk to you about your body mass index (BMI), which is a calculation that uses your height and weight. Your BMI is a quick way for your doctor to see whether your weight is putting you at risk of health problems.

As BMI increases, health risk increases; thus, your BMI category can be important. In general, a BMI between 25 and 29 falls into the "overweight" category, and a BMI of 30 or greater falls into the "obesity" category. See the chart below to find which category you fall into. Your healthcare team can help you find where you fit.



- Underweight BMI = Less than 18.5
- Normal BMI = 18.5-24.9
- Overweight BMI = 25-29.9
- Extreme overweight/obesity = 30 or greater

If you have excess weight, losing as little as 5% to 10% of your body weight can greatly improve your health. This means that a person who weighs 200 pounds may benefit from lifestyle changes that result in as little as a 10-pound weight loss (5% of original body weight).

If you have excess weight, even a small weight loss can reverse or eliminate health problems by helping to:

- Reduce blood pressure
- Improve cholesterol levels
- Reduce joint pain
- Lower high blood sugar levels in people with diabetes
- Reduce the risk of developing other health problems



The following tips can help keep you on track in your weight-loss journey.

Set short-term goals

A small initial weight loss that is maintained can provide real health benefits. A reasonable first goal is a 5% weight loss, which you should be able to achieve within 3 months. Then you can set another goal—a 10% weight loss in 6 months is a good goal. To meet these goals and achieve a healthier lifestyle, your healthcare team may ask you to get lifestyle counseling. Lifestyle changes mainly focus on two things—diet and physical activity level.

Choose a healthier diet

Making changes to your diet is also important. Your doctor may suggest that you reduce your daily calorie intake. This does not always mean eating less or skipping meals, but it does mean making healthier choices. For example, if you currently have orange juice, 3 eggs, bacon, and buttered toast for breakfast, start by cutting your juice portion in half, substituting egg whites or turkey bacon, or having fruit instead of toast. Using a food diary to keep track of what you eat is also recommended. You might be surprised to see how many unhealthful foods you eat each day or find out what types of events cause you to make poor food choices.



Increase your physical activity

It's very important to slowly increase your physical activity level. If you spend most of your time on the couch, do not try to run a 5K race on your first day of exercising. Instead, start by walking at a moderate pace for about 10 minutes a day for at least 5 days a week. Slowly increase your walking time by 5 minutes a day until you are walking at least 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. Again, recording your activity is highly recommended. Wearing a pedometer or other exercise tracker can be an inexpensive way to get feedback on how you are doing and can help keep you motivated.



Talk to your healthcare team

If physical difficulties stop you from walking or performing other physical activities, ask someone on your healthcare team to suggest exercises that you can do. Likewise, if you are not sure how to change your diet to lose weight, get help from someone on your healthcare team. A special diet might be needed if you have high blood pressure or unhealthy lipid levels. Your healthcare team can recommend a diet or connect you with a dietitian, who can help you make healthier choices (like provide healthy recipes and grocery lists) based on your preferences and needs.

If you are very overweight, having trouble losing weight, or having serious health problems related to your weight, your doctor may suggest a medication. Many new prescription medications are available that are safe and effective at helping with weight loss. Your doctor will discuss the options with you in detail if he or she feels that this is a good choice.

In some extreme cases, surgery may be needed to help with weight loss. Remember that undergoing surgery and/or taking medication do not mean that you should stop trying to improve your diet and activity level, which are still essential to a healthy lifestyle.





Best of luck in your weight-loss journey! Remember, small steps are the key to success. A healthier you is right around the bend.

Proven tips for successful weight loss

1. Set a goal that is easy to achieve, such as a 10% weight loss in 6 months.
2. Keep track of your weight, food intake, and activity levels, which will help keep you focused and motivated.
3. Choose a diet that includes healthy foods AND fewer calories.
4. For exercise, start low (like 10 minutes of walking a day) and go slow (increase by 5 minutes a day each week) until you are exercising at least 30 minutes, 5 days a week.
5. Do not be discouraged. Weight loss might happen quickly at first, then level off—this is to be expected. Losing at least 1 pound a week is good progress.
6. Communicate with your healthcare team for advice and support.
7. Ask your doctor or healthcare team about weight-loss programs, which may be covered by your insurance plan; ask whether a weight-loss medication might be right for you.



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