

Taking Action: 10 Steps for Healthy Weight Management in Adults

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This publication describes how choosing whole grains, low-fat dairy products and other foods, and physical activity, can help achieve health and weight goals.

Poor diet and physical inactivity are contributing to Americans being overweight, according to the recently released 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Why is this happening? Well, most experts believe that Americans have lost track of balancing their calories and physical activity. Being overweight and obese can be prevented or reduced through improved eating and physical activity behaviors. We can achieve this by:

- Controlling total calorie intake to manage body weight. For people who are overweight or obese, this means consuming fewer calories from foods and beverages.
- Increasing physical activity and reduce time spent in sedentary behaviors.
- Maintaining appropriate calorie balance during each stage of life — childhood, adolescence, adulthood, pregnancy and breastfeeding, and older age.

The following actions can help every adult manage his or her body weight realistically, and with the potential for the greatest adherence. These steps can be adopted by all adults and used to develop healthy approaches to lifetime weight management.

1. Assess Your Own Healthy Weight

While too much emphasis has been placed on fitting into a certain weight category or wearing a certain clothing size, individual healthy weight is important and should be identified. The following website has information about body mass index that can be personalized for your height: <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>. Check your family history of weight-related diseases. With a family history of adult onset (Type II) diabetes, premature heart disease, or high blood pressure, you will need to be more careful about your own weight. In addition, establish how much body fat you are carrying and



Lifelong health and body weight may be attained by eating fresh fruits and vegetables, low-fat milk and yogurt, and whole grains.

where. If excess fat is carried around your abdomen, there is greater risk of disease. If you can pinch more than an inch or if your waist measure is equal to or greater than your hip measurement, your excess fat is huddling around your mid-section and putting your health at risk.

2. Goal Setting

Setting goals is deciding what action steps to take in maintaining or reaching a healthy body weight. Chart a course. Set small, achievable goals. Work on one or two goals at a time. Write them down and post them visibly. This way you can remind yourself about your goals and make notes when they are achieved. Keep your goals positive — avoid using “can’t” or “shouldn’t.”

Examples:

- This week I will purchase 1 percent milk for my family rather than whole milk.
- At least three times this week I will use my lunch hour to walk for 15 minutes.
- This week at least once I will prepare a low-fat main dish for myself and my family.
- This week I will record my food intake at meals and snacks.

3. Talk Positively to Yourself

Positive self-talk will allow you to identify aspects of yourself that you like and appreciate. Focusing on your likable traits and learning to appreciate them will leave less time to belittle personal characteristics. Positive self-talk encourages positive thinking and positive actions.

4. Reward Yourself

Give yourself a reward when you achieve a goal or do something that has required effort. These can be small gifts to you, such as allowing special time for yourself or with others, or going to special events. Rewards are best when they occur soon after your accomplishment.

5. Be Physically Active

Research indicates that moderate levels of physical activity produce healthful benefits. Physical activity is a morale booster, and people who choose to be active feel good about themselves. The 2008 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Physical Activity Recommendation for Americans age 6 years and older states that regular physical activity helps people maintain a healthy weight and prevents excess weight gain.

The amount of physical activity necessary to maintain a healthy weight depends on a person's caloric intake and varies considerably among the different age groups. Children ages 6 to 17 years should have at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily. Adults 18 to 64 years of age should have 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity or 75 minutes a week of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity.

Adults should include muscle strengthening exercises on two or more days of the week. Older adults can follow the adult guidelines but also need to include exercises to help with balance and determine what the correct effort level is for them based on their fitness. Note: contact your physician to help you determine your fitness level. To increase physical activity, determine how active you are now. Identify times of the day when you could add more activity. Parking farther out in the work or shopping parking lot increases walking activity. Squeeze in walks during lunch hours or after an evening meal. Start gently and slowly.

6. Choose Lower Fat Foods and Limit Refined Grains

Choose Lower Fat Foods

Dietary fats are found in both plant and animal foods. Humans need some fat in the diet because fats supply calories, essential fatty acids, and help with the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K. Acceptable ranges for total fat intake for adults 19 years and older are 20-35 percent of calories. This range is associated with reduced risk of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, while at that same time providing adequate intake of essential nutrients.

Work toward lower fat intakes by:

- Eating fewer foods that contain solid fats (examples include cakes; cookies; desserts made with butter, margarine or shortening; pizza; processed and fatty meats; and ice cream).

- Selecting lean meat, fish, or poultry and using meat substitutes such as dry beans.
- Selecting fat-free or low-fat milk and dairy products.
- When cooking, replace solid fats such as butter, beef fat, chicken fat, lard, stick margarine, and shortening with oils, or choose cooking methods that do not add fat.
- Choosing baked, steamed, or broiled rather than fried foods most often.
- Checking the Nutrition Facts Label to choose foods with little or no saturated fat.

Limit Refined Grains

When whole grains are refined, vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber are lost. Although most refined grain products have iron, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and folic acid added back in (a process called enriching), this process doesn't return all of the vitamins and minerals that were taken out during the refining process. When refined grain products are eaten above recommended amounts, they can provide too many calories because they are often high in solid fats and added sugars (e.g., cookies and cakes). Major sources of refined grains are yeast breads, pizza, grain-based desserts, and tortillas. At the 2,000-calorie level, individuals should eat no more than three ounce-equivalents per day of refined grains. In general, one slice of bread, one cup of ready-to-eat cereal, or one-half cup of cooked rice, cooked pasta, or cooked cereal can be considered as one ounce-equivalent from the grains group.

Start eating more whole grains by:

- Replacing refined grains with whole grains, so at least half your grains are whole grains.
- Eating fewer refined grain products, especially those high in calories from solid fats and/or added sugars, such as cakes, cookies, other desserts, and pizza.
- Choosing foods that name one of the following whole-grain ingredients *first* on the label's ingredient list: brown rice, bulgur, graham flour, oatmeal, whole-grain corn, whole oats, whole rye, whole wheat, or wild rice.

7. Increase Fruits, Veggies, and Low-fat Dairy

Fruit Focus

- Use fruit as snacks, salads, or desserts.
- Instead of sugars, syrups, or sweet toppings, use fruit to top off cereal and pancakes.
- Eat a variety of fruits and maximize taste and freshness by eating what is in season.
- Use canned, frozen, and dried fruits, as well as fresh.
- Unsweetened fruit or fruit canned in 100 percent juice is the better choice because light or heavy syrup adds sugar and calories.
- Select 100 percent fruit juice when choosing juices.

Vary Vegetables

- Include vegetables in meals and in snacks; fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables all count.
- Add dark-green, red, and orange vegetables to soups, stews, casseroles, and stir-fries.

- Use dark leafy greens, such as romaine lettuce and spinach, to make salads.
- If using a dip, choose lower-calorie options, such as yogurt-based dressings or hummus.
- With salads, ask for the dressing on the side so you can decide how much to use.

Dairy Dining

- Drink fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1 percent) milk; gradually switch to lower-fat versions.
- When drinking beverages, such as cappuccino or latte, request fat-free or low-fat milk.
- Use fat-free or low-fat milk on cereal and oatmeal.
- Top fruit salads with fat-free or low-fat yogurt.
- Substitute plain fat-free or low-fat yogurt for sour cream in dips.
- Select low-fat or reduced-fat versions of cheese.
- If you are lactose intolerant, try lactose-free milk, drink smaller amounts of milk at a time, or try fortified soy beverages.

8. Choose a Variety of Foods

Build daily food choices around a variety of foods from all the groups (grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, and protein). Eat within the recommended amounts for each food group to meet your nutritional needs. By watching portion sizes, choosing lower-fat, and limiting refined grains and alcohol, you will develop lifetime food habits and will help to manage your weight. For more information on planning your diet pattern, see www.mypyramid.gov and click on “Interactive Tools.”

9. Watch Portion Sizes

A portion is the amount of food that you choose to eat for a meal or snack. A serving is a measured amount of food or drink, such as one slice of bread or one cup (8 ounces) of milk. Many foods that come as a single portion actually contain multiple *servings*. The Nutrition Facts Label on packaged foods (on the backs of cans, sides of boxes) tells the number of servings in the container. For example, a 20-ounce soda (typically consumed as one portion), has two and one-half servings in it. A 3-ounce bag of chips, which some would consider a single portion, contains three servings.

MyPyramid Suggested Serving Sizes of Common Foods:

- *Breads, cereals, and other grain products* — 1 ounce equals: 1 slice bread, 1/2 hamburger bun or English muffin, 1 cup dry cereal, or 1/2 cup rice, pasta, or cooked cereal, or 1 small tortilla
- *Vegetables* — 1 cup equals: 1 cup cooked or chopped raw vegetables, 2 cups leafy raw vegetable, 1 medium potato or 1 cup vegetable juice
- *Fruits* — 1 cup equals: 1 whole medium fruit, 1 whole 8-inch banana, 1 cup fresh berries, 1 cup canned fruit, 1 cup juice, or 1/2 cup dried fruit

- *Dairy* — 1 cup equals: 1, 8-ounce cup milk, 1 cup yogurt, or 1 1/2 - 2 ounces cheese
- *Protein* — 1 ounce equals: 1 ounce lean meat, fish or poultry, 1 egg, 1/4 cup cooked dry beans, 1 tablespoon peanut butter, or 1/2 ounce nuts or seed

10. Complete a Behavior Inventory

One of the most useful steps in managing weight is to keep a behavior inventory. Check your snacking habits and how you prepare foods. Snacks can be a part of your daily food plan but they need to be planned carefully. Snacks make a big difference in energy intake if you select high-fat, sugar-added snacks. Determine how hungry you are when you eat and delay eating if you are not hungry. Make note of whether you use extra added fat as you cook, and make adjustments when possible. Also, look at your shopping skills and habits, moods, or feelings when you eat, and the time and place in which you do most of your eating. If any of these factors are excessive or affect your ability to manage your weight, think how you can make some changes.

Resources

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010* (7th ed.). <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm>.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). *MyPyramid: Steps to a Healthier You*. <http://www.mypyramid.gov/>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Health and Safety Topics*. <http://www.cdc.gov/>.
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. *Portion Distortion*. <http://hp2010.nhlbi.nih.net/portion/>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2008*. <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/>.

Acknowledgment

The author wishes to acknowledge that Linda Boeckner authored an earlier version of this NebGuide.

This publication has been peer reviewed.

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Issued May 2011

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