There are many ways to lose weight, but it is not always easy to keep the weight off. The key to successful weight loss is making changes in your eating and physical activity habits that you can keep up for the rest of your life. The information presented here may help put you on the road to healthy habits.
Can I benefit from weight loss?

Health experts agree that you may gain health benefits from even a small weight loss if:

- You are considered obese based on your body mass index (BMI) (see BMI chart on page 3).
- You are considered overweight based on your BMI and have weight-related health problems or a family history of such problems.
- You have a waist that measures more than 40 inches if you are a man or more than 35 inches if you are a woman.

A weight loss of 5 to 7 percent of body weight may improve your health and quality of life, and it may prevent weight-related health problems, like type 2 diabetes. For a person who weighs 200 pounds, this means losing 10 to 14 pounds.

Even if you do not need to lose weight, you should still follow healthy eating and physical activity habits to help prevent weight gain and keep you healthy over the years.
Body Mass Index

BMI is a tool that is often used to determine whether a person’s health is at risk due to his or her weight. It is a ratio of your weight to your height. A BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 is considered healthy, a BMI of 25 to 29.9 is considered overweight, and a BMI of 30 or more is considered obese. You can find your BMI using the chart below, and you can also see the weight range that is healthy for your height.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BMI</th>
<th>NORMAL</th>
<th>OVERWEIGHT</th>
<th>OBSE</th>
<th>EXTREME OBESITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height (Feet inches)</td>
<td>Weight (Pounds)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4'10&quot;</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>4'11&quot;</td>
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<td>27</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5'6&quot;</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can I lose weight?

To lose weight you need to take in fewer calories than you use. You can do this by creating and following a plan for healthy eating and a plan for regular physical activity.

You may also choose to follow a formal weight-loss program that can help you make lifelong changes in your eating and physical activity habits. See page 6 for more information on weight-loss programs.

Your Plan for Healthy Eating

It may be hard to stick to a weight-loss “diet” that limits your portions to very small sizes or excludes certain foods. You may have difficulty making that work over the long term. Instead, a healthy eating plan takes into account your likes and dislikes, and includes a variety of foods that give you enough calories and nutrients for good health.

Make sure your healthy eating plan is one that:

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

The Nutrition Facts label from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is found on most packaged foods. It tells you how many calories and how much fat, protein, carbohydrate, and other nutrients are in one serving of the food. For more information on the Nutrition Facts, see “Other Resources” at the end of this brochure.

For more specific information about food groups and nutrition values, visit http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.
Your Plan for Regular Physical Activity

Regular physical activity may help you lose weight and keep it off. It may also improve your energy level and mood, and lower your risk for developing heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers.

According to the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, experts believe all adults should be physically active. Some activity is better than none, and individuals who engage in any amount of physical activity may gain some health benefits. The majority of your physical activity should be moderate to vigorous in intensity. However, adults should aim to include muscle-strengthening activities as well. For more information on the Physical Activity Guidelines, see the “Other Resources” section at the end of this brochure.

You can be physically active every day for one extended period of time, or you can break it up into shorter sessions of 20, 15, or even 10 minutes. Try some of these physical activities:

- walking
  (15 minutes per mile or 4 miles per hour)
- biking
- tennis
- aerobic exercise classes (step aerobics, kick boxing, dancing)
- energetic house or yard work (gardening, raking, mopping, vacuuming)
What types of weight-loss programs are available?

There are two different types of weight-loss programs—clinical and nonclinical. Knowing what a good program will offer and what to look for may help you choose a weight-loss program that will work for you.

Nonclinical Program

What it is: A nonclinical program may be commercially operated, such as a privately owned weight-loss chain. You can follow a nonclinical program on your own by using a counselor, book, website, or weight-loss product. You can also join others in a support group, worksite program, or community-based program. Nonclinical weight-loss programs may require you to use the program’s foods or supplements.

What a safe and effective program will offer:

◆ Books, pamphlets, and websites that are written or reviewed by a licensed health professional such as a medical doctor (M.D.) or registered dietitian (R.D.).

◆ Balanced information about following a healthy eating plan and getting regular physical activity.
Leaders or counselors who show you their training credentials. (Program leaders or counselors may not be licensed health professionals.)

Program cautions:

◆ If a program requires you to buy prepackaged meals, find out how much the meals will cost—they may be expensive. Also, eating prepackaged meals does not let you learn the food selection and cooking skills you will need to maintain weight loss over the long term.

◆ Avoid any diet that suggests you eat a certain formula, food, or combination of foods for easy weight loss. Some of these diets may work in the short term because they are low in calories. But they may not give you all the nutrients your body needs and they do not teach healthy eating habits.

◆ Avoid programs that do not include a physical activity plan.

◆ Talk to your health care provider before using any weight-loss product, such as a supplement, herb, or over-the-counter medication.

Clinical Program

What it is: A clinical program provides services in a health care setting, such as a hospital. One or more licensed health professionals, such as medical doctors, nurses, registered dietitians, and psychologists, provide
care. A clinical program may or may not be commercially owned.

Clinical programs may offer services such as nutrition education, physical activity, and behavior change therapy. Some programs offer prescription weight-loss drugs or gastrointestinal surgery.

**Prescription Weight-loss Drugs**

If your BMI is 30 or more, or your BMI is 27 or more and you have weight-related health problems, you may consider using prescription weight-loss drugs. Drugs should be used as part of an overall program that includes long-term changes in eating and physical activity habits. Only a licensed health care provider can prescribe these drugs. See “Additional Reading” for more information about prescription medications for the treatment of obesity.

**Bariatric Surgery**

If your BMI is 40 or more, or your BMI is 35 or more and you have weight-related health problems such as diabetes or heart disease, you may consider bariatric surgery (also called gastrointestinal surgery). Most patients lose weight quickly. To keep the weight off, most will need to eat healthy and get regular physical activity over the long term. Surgery may also reduce the amount of vitamins and minerals that are absorbed by your body. The rapid weight loss as a result of bariatric surgery may also
cause gallstones. See the “Additional Reading” section for more information about bariatric surgery.

**What a safe and effective program will offer:**

- A team of licensed health professionals.
- A plan to help you keep weight off after you have lost it.

**Program cautions:**

There may be side effects or health risks involved in the program that can be serious. Discuss these with your health care provider.

Regardless of the type of weight-loss program you choose, be sure you have follow-up visits with your health care provider. He or she may suggest ways to deal with setbacks or obstacles you may face along the way, as well as answer any questions you may have as you move forward.

For more detailed information about choosing a safe and successful weight-loss program, see the “Additional Reading” section at the end of this brochure.

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**It is not always easy to change your eating and physical activity habits.**

You may have setbacks along the way.

**But keep trying—you can do it!**
Additional Reading

From the Weight-control Information Network

Active at Any Size describes the benefits of being physically active no matter what a person’s size. The brochure presents a variety of activities that large people can enjoy safely.

Bariatric Surgery for Severe Obesity describes the different types of surgery available to treat severe obesity. It explains how gastrointestinal surgery promotes weight loss and the benefits and risks of each procedure.

Changing Your Habits: Steps to Better Health guides readers through steps that can help them determine what “stage” they are in—how ready they are—to make healthy lifestyle changes. Once that stage is determined, strategies on how to make healthy eating and physical activity changes are offered.

Just Enough for You describes the difference between a portion—the amount of food a person chooses to eat—and a measured serving. It offers tips for judging portion sizes and for controlling portions at home and when eating out.

Prescription Medications for the Treatment of Obesity presents information on medications that suppress appetite or reduce the body’s ability to absorb dietary fat. The types of medications and the risks and benefits of each are described.

Walking…A Step in the Right Direction offers tips for getting started on a walking program and illustrates warm-up stretching exercises. It also includes a sample walking program.

Weight and Waist Measurement explains two simple measures—BMI and waist circumference—to help people determine if their weight and/or body fat distribution are putting their health at risk.
Other Resources


Weight-control Information Network

1 WIN Way
Bethesda, MD 20892–3665
Phone: (202) 828–1025
Toll-free number: 1–877–946–4627
Fax: (202) 828–1028
Email: win@info.niddk.nih.gov
Internet: http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov

The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health, which is the Federal Government’s lead agency responsible for biomedical research on nutrition and obesity. Authorized by Congress (Public Law 103–43), WIN provides the general public, health professionals, the media, and Congress with up-to-date, science-based health information on weight control, obesity, physical activity, and related nutritional issues.

Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This publication was also reviewed by F. Xavier Pi-Sunyer, M.D., M.P.H., Director, New York Obesity Research Center, St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital Center, and English H. Gonzalez, M.D., M.P.H., Community Medicine and Curriculum Development Coordinator, St. Vincent’s East Family Medicine Residency Program in Birmingham, AL.

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