

## The Truth About Weight Control



# NOT!

Increasing emphasis on health and fitness is motivating many Americans to try to lose weight and the weight reduction business has become very profitable. Unfortunately, there are many myths about controlling weight. This fact sheet provides reliable information on weight control and answers some commonly asked questions about losing weight.

### Myth Versus Truth

Weight control experts are everywhere. Some are self-proclaimed, others are professional scientists. Some of the information is sound, some contains partial truth, and other information is actually false.

Nutrition professionals try to provide the public with recommendations based on

research. Rather than make exaggerated claims of “magical remedies” or “revolutionary” discoveries, they are cautious in their advice.

In contrast, nonscientific “experts” often mix facts with personal views. They are very enthusiastic about their products and their plans, but they also are often misleading; sometimes they are just out to make money through fraud. Be suspicious of a weight loss plan that suggests any of the following:

- Your diet must differ greatly from the recommendations given in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid.
- Diet or exercise is a cure-all for a number of different medical conditions.

- The diet plan promotes a commercial product.
- The diet plan is heavily endorsed through testimonials by athletes, movie stars, and other celebrities.
- Any of the following phrases are used to describe the diet plan:
  - “Lose weight overnight”
  - “Melt away pounds”
  - “Nothing to it!”
  - “Miracle diet” or “effortless exercise”
  - “Secret ingredient” or “magic new method”
  - “Amazing new discovery” or “breakthrough”
  - “Natural health” or “nature’s way”
  - “Special life-giving properties”
  - “Ancient remedy” or “new European method”
  - “Revitalize” or “renew” sexual potency.

Maintain a healthy skepticism of products and books that make rash claims. Nutrition and exercise misinformation continues to flood the public market because it is a lucrative business.

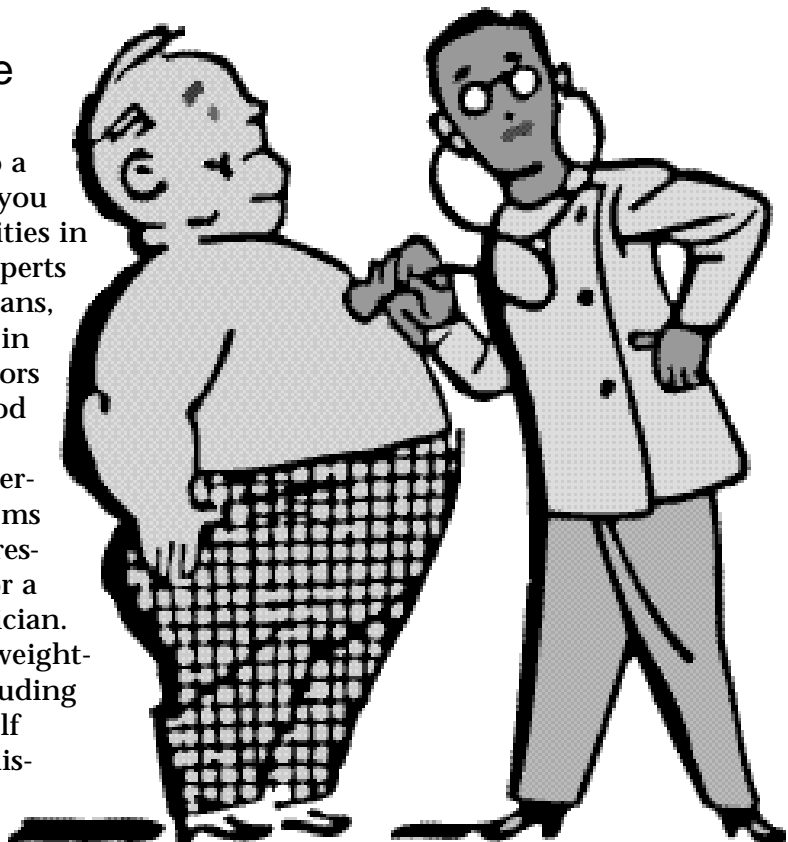
## Who and What to Believe

If you want accurate information about law, you go to a lawyer—not to a computer scientist or a movie star. If you want to go on a diet, seek out authorities in the field of nutrition. In nutrition, experts include nutritionists, registered dietitians, physicians and nurses who specialize in weight control, and Extension educators who are trained to guide you with food selection and preparation. If you are older than 40 and want to start an exercise program but have medical problems such as heart disease or high blood pressure, or if you have been sedentary for a long time, check first with your physician.

Although there are many types of weight-management programs available, including commercial, clinical, and do-it-yourself programs, their long-term success is dismal. Studies show that, on the average, people lose about 10

percent of their body weight but regain two-thirds of this weight within one year after ending the program. Within five years, almost all the weight is gained back.

The Institute of Medicine, a unit of the National Academy of Sciences, published a report that raises questions about the safety and effectiveness of popular weight-loss programs and offers guidelines for selecting and recommendations for improving these programs. The report, “Weighing the Options: Criteria for Evaluating Weight-Management Programs,” states that weight-loss programs should emphasize long-term weight management rather than short-term weight loss. The goal should not be simply losing weight for appearance’s sake but improving overall health. In addition to increasing self-esteem, losing weight reduces the risks of osteoarthritis, sleep apnea (difficulty in breathing during sleep), and certain cancers. Experts say that even for people who are very heavy, losing as few as ten to fifteen pounds can reduce blood levels of cholesterol and triglycerides (fats), lower elevated blood pressure, and decrease abnormally high levels of blood glucose





(sugar), which are associated with diabetes. These changes may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.

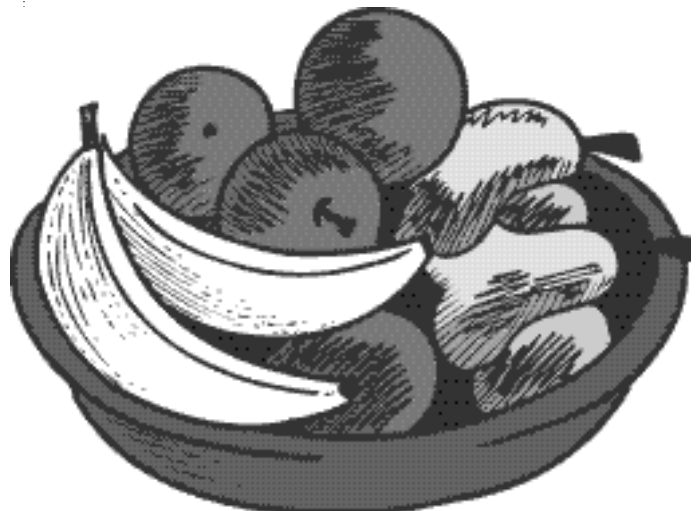
Individuals trying to lose weight should select programs that promote a balanced diet and other principles of good nutrition and that emphasize physical activity, a critical component for successful weight loss. Research shows that the people who are most successful in keeping weight off are those who make exercise a regular, permanent part of their lifestyle. The report offers these guidelines and strategies for selecting and sticking with a weight-management program:

- Find a program that can back its advertising and promotional claims with proof that the program works. For example, a program should be able to provide statistics showing the percentage of clients who have lost weight and not regained it for one and two years, as well as the percentage of clients for whom this information is available. If this information is not available or consists mainly of testimonials or other anecdotal evidence, be suspicious of the

program. Program managers have a responsibility to provide consumers with truthful and unambiguous information that is neither misleading nor likely to be misinterpreted.

- Know the credentials and qualifications of the people running the program.
- Ask for detailed information about potential health risks. For example, people who lose weight rapidly while on a very low-fat diet are at risk for gall bladder disease.
- Be realistic about what you hope to accomplish through the program and be willing to devote the time and effort required to attain your goal.
- Avoid diets of less than 800 calories a day except under medical supervision.
- Look for a weight-management program that includes an exercise program tailored to you. People who have been sedentary should begin to exercise slowly and moderately, then gradually increase the intensity and duration of their activities.

The Institute of Medicine report recommends that consumers monitor their overall health while on a weight-management program and consult with a physician if they have high blood pressure, diabetes, or other conditions related to obesity. The report also points out the need to learn more about the causes of obesity so that more effective weight-management programs can be designed.

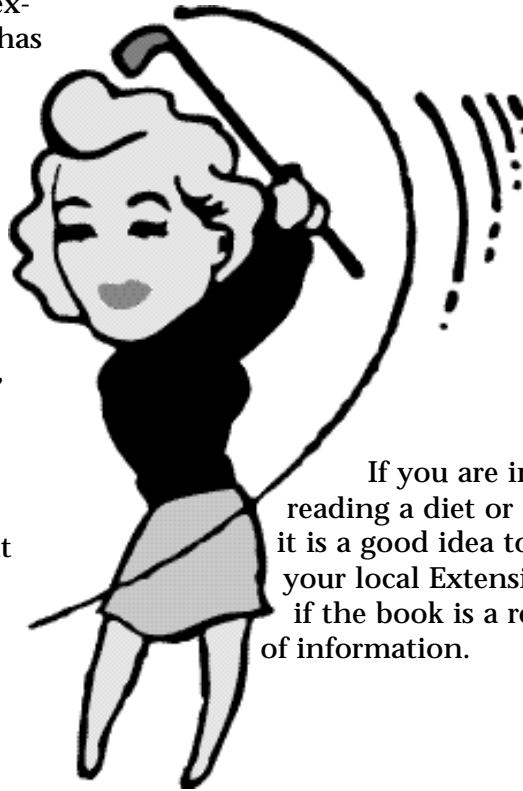


## Dietary Rules for Commonsense Weight Control

Most Americans live in an environment where high-calorie foods are plentiful, inexpensive, and heavily advertised, and this has contributed to an epidemic of obesity in this country. Controlling your weight may not be easy, but you can increase your chance by following a commonsense approach. Your diet plan should:

- Satisfy all your nutritional needs;
- Protect you from hunger between meals, give you a sense of well-being, and not make you feel tired;
- Be one that, with suitable caloric modifications, you can use as a pattern for lifetime eating;
- Be easy for you to stay on, whether at home or away, without making you feel uncomfortable;
- Come as close as possible to your personal eating habits and tastes;

- Use foods readily available from the supermarket; and
- Include exercise or physical activities you enjoy.

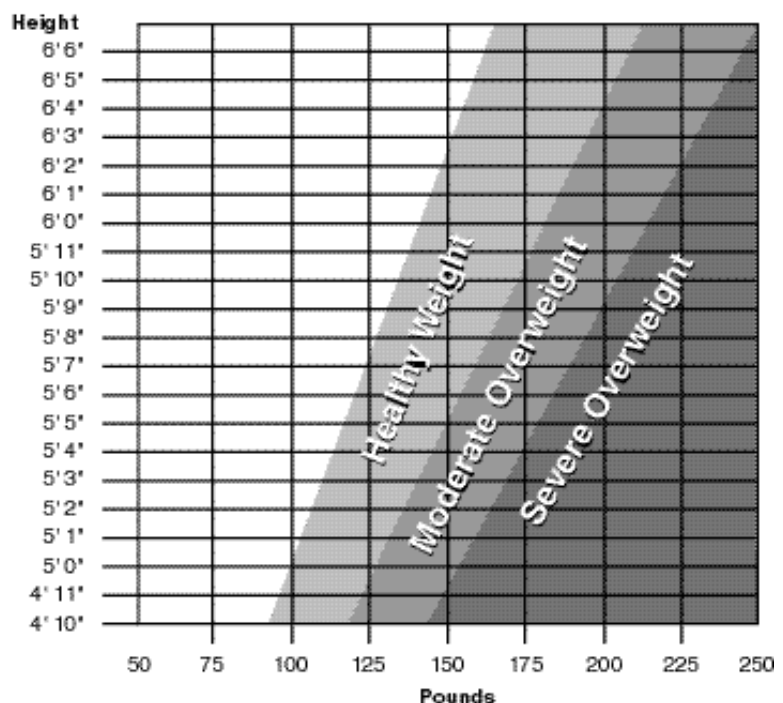


If you are interested in reading a diet or nutrition book, it is a good idea to check with your local Extension office to see if the book is a reputable source of information.

## Are You Overweight?

Research suggests that the Body Mass Index (BMI) might be a more accurate way of determining if you are overweight than just weighing yourself on a scale, although both are useful.

To calculate your BMI, multiply your weight in pounds by 705, divide this number by your height in inches, and then divide this result by your height in inches again. A BMI between 21 and 25 indicates a healthy weight. As the BMI increases above 25, the risk of heart disease and diabetes also rises.



Source: *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, 1995.

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# Calories and Activity Level

## Calorie Values for 10 Minutes of Activity

This table shows the amount of calories an individual burns up in 10 minutes doing some common activities. A heavier person (250 pounds) uses up more calories for a given activity than a lighter individual (125 pounds) because the former has more weight to carry around and therefore must work harder.

|                             | Body Weight   |               |               |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                             | 125<br>Pounds | 175<br>Pounds | 250<br>Pounds |
| <i>Personal Necessities</i> |               |               |               |
| Sleeping                    | 10            | 14            | 20            |
| Sitting (watching TV)       | 10            | 14            | 18            |
| Sitting (talking)           | 15            | 21            | 30            |
| Dressing or washing         | 26            | 37            | 53            |
| Standing                    | 12            | 16            | 24            |
| <i>Locomotion</i>           |               |               |               |
| Walking downstairs          | 56            | 78            | 111           |
| Walking upstairs            | 146           | 202           | 288           |
| Walking at 2 mph            | 29            | 40            | 58            |
| Walking at 4 mph            | 52            | 72            | 102           |
| Running at 5.5 mph          | 90            | 125           | 178           |
| Running at 7 mph            | 118           | 164           | 232           |
| Running at 12 mph           | 164           | 228           | 326           |
| Cycling at 5.5 mph          | 42            | 58            | 83            |
| Cycling at 13 mph           | 89            | 124           | 178           |
| <i>Housework</i>            |               |               |               |
| Making beds                 | 32            | 46            | 65            |
| Washing floors              | 38            | 53            | 75            |
| Washing windows             | 35            | 48            | 69            |
| Dusting                     | 22            | 31            | 44            |
| Preparing a meal            | 32            | 46            | 65            |
| Shoveling snow              | 65            | 89            | 130           |
| Light gardening             | 30            | 42            | 59            |
| Weeding garden              | 49            | 68            | 98            |
| Mowing grass (power)        | 34            | 47            | 67            |
| Mowing grass (manual)       | 38            | 52            | 74            |
| <i>Sedentary Occupation</i> |               |               |               |
| Sitting writing             | 15            | 21            | 30            |
| Light office work           | 25            | 34            | 50            |
| Standing, light activity    | 20            | 28            | 40            |
| Typing (electric)           | 19            | 27            | 39            |

*continued on next page*

## Calories and Activity Level (continued)

|                        | Body Weight   |               |               |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                        | 125<br>Pounds | 175<br>Pounds | 250<br>Pounds |
| <i>Light Work</i>      |               |               |               |
| Assembly line          | 20            | 28            | 40            |
| Auto repair            | 35            | 48            | 69            |
| Carpentry              | 32            | 44            | 64            |
| Bricklaying            | 28            | 40            | 57            |
| Farming chores         | 32            | 44            | 64            |
| House painting         | 29            | 40            | 58            |
| <i>Heavy Work</i>      |               |               |               |
| Pick & shovel work     | 56            | 78            | 110           |
| Chopping wood          | 60            | 84            | 121           |
| Dragging logs          | 158           | 220           | 315           |
| Drilling coal          | 79            | 111           | 159           |
| <i>Recreation</i>      |               |               |               |
| Badminton              | 43            | 65            | 94            |
| Baseball               | 39            | 54            | 78            |
| Basketball             | 58            | 82            | 117           |
| Bowling (nonstop)      | 56            | 78            | 111           |
| Canoeing (4 mph)       | 90            | 128           | 182           |
| Dancing (moderate)     | 35            | 48            | 69            |
| Dancing (vigorous)     | 48            | 66            | 94            |
| Football               | 69            | 96            | 137           |
| Golfing                | 33            | 48            | 68            |
| Horseback riding       | 56            | 75            | 112           |
| Ping-pong              | 32            | 45            | 64            |
| Racquetball            | 75            | 104           | 144           |
| Skiing (alpine)        | 80            | 112           | 160           |
| Skiing (water)         | 60            | 88            | 130           |
| Skiing (cross country) | 98            | 138           | 194           |
| Squash                 | 75            | 104           | 144           |
| Swimming (backstroke)  | 32            | 45            | 64            |
| Swimming (crawl)       | 40            | 56            | 80            |
| Tennis                 | 56            | 89            | 115           |
| Volleyball             | 43            | 65            | 94            |

**Source:** Brownell, K.D. 1988. *The LEARN Program for Weight Control.*

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, University of Maryland, College Park, and local governments. Thomas A. Fretz, Director of Maryland Cooperative Extension, University of Maryland.

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