

Lifestyle Choices: Maintaining a Healthy Weight



The rewards of making healthy lifestyle choices can help maintain a healthy weight, which in turn has its own rewards in lowered risk for heart disease, diabetes, and stroke. Maintaining a healthy weight will help you look and feel better, reduce stress, improve memory, and maintain bone mass.

How Can I Do It?

Maintaining a healthy weight means understanding the balance between food and physical activity. It is important to understand the connection between the calories your body takes in and the calories your body uses through normal body functions, daily activities, and physical activity.

Eating healthy foods and staying physically active maintains this balance. When the balance shifts, weight is either gained or lost.

Getting the Most Out of Your Calories

A balanced diet includes food from all the food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, meat and beans, milk, and oils. To find out more about the food groups, explore the "Inside the Pyramid" website (<http://mypyramid.gov/pyramid/index.html>).



Choose the most nutritionally rich foods you can from each food group. Look for foods packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other nutrients, but lower in calories. Choose foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free dairy products. Also look for lean meats, eggs, fish, poultry, and beans. Stay away from trans fats (found mostly in processed foods such as cookies, crackers, potato chips, margarine, and microwave popcorn) and choose healthy fats such as the Omega-3s (found in cold-water fish, soybeans, flaxseed, pumpkin seeds, and walnuts).

Portion Sizes

A "portion" or "serving" is the amount of a specific food you choose to eat. Many times, people underestimate the amount of food they've consumed and overestimate the portion size recommended on the food label. To better control how much of a particular food you are eating, try picturing portion sizes as everyday items. For instance, the size of a:



- Baseball – a serving of vegetables or fruit
- Deck of cards – a serving of meat, fish or poultry
- Golf ball – one-quarter cup of dried fruit or nuts
- Tennis ball – equals about one-half cup of ice cream
- Computer mouse – the size of a small baked potato
- Compact disc – the size of a pancake or waffle

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Physical Activity



The other side of the equation is physical activity. Physical activity should be a part of your everyday routine for at least 30 minutes. If time is limited, exercise in brief periods throughout the day. For example, exercise for three 10-minute sessions rather than one 30-minute session. Activities that can be easily incorporated into short exercise spurts include:

- Turn off the TV and take a walk, even if it's only for 10 minutes.
- Look for ways to walk more. Take a walk around the block when you get the mail, take the dog on an extra outing, or walk on the treadmill 5 minutes before getting ready for work.
- Do some physical chores such as shoveling snow, working in the garden, raking leaves, or washing the car by hand. Although these activities may not be vigorous exercise, they can keep you moving.
- Pace while you talk on the phone. If you have a staircase, walk up and down the steps while you visit with a friend on the phone.

Making healthy lifestyle choices, however small, can have significant results for maintaining weight and good health.

For more information see the following websites:

http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/calltoaction/fact_advice.htm
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/live-it/healthy.htm>
<http://mypyramid.gov/pyramid/index.html>