

Maintaining a healthy weight

Americans seem to be obsessed with their weight – and with good reason. More than half of the U.S. adult population and nearly one-fifth of U.S. children and adolescents are overweight. In addition, obesity-related conditions are second only to tobacco smoking as a leading cause of preventable deaths.

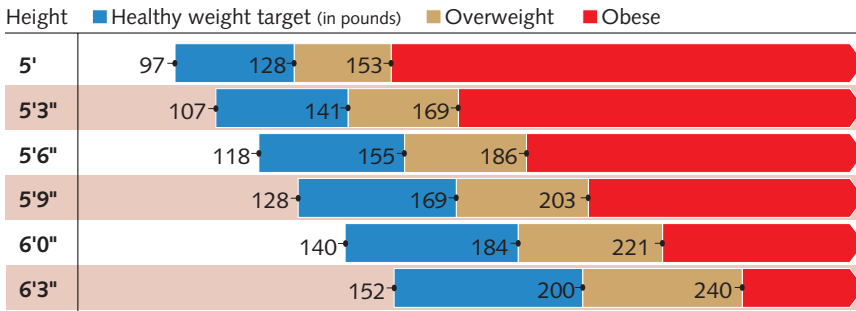
It is not surprising then that at any given time, 1 in 4 men and almost half of all women are trying to lose weight and that Americans spend billions each year on weight loss products and services. However, the number of obese Americans continues to increase, and the need to maintain a healthy

body weight is a major public health concern.

Researchers like those reporting in the January 20, 1999, issue of *JAMA* continue to seek answers to whether the use of certain new medications can help people lose weight and keep it off. Unfortunately, no single drug or single approach is universally effective for weight loss. If you are overweight or obese, the best way to lose weight is to do it slowly. Be wary of any diet or drug that promises quick results. Be sure to consult your doctor about which weight management options are best for your specific needs.

ARE YOU OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE?

You become overweight when you take in more calories than you burn off with physical activity. This imbalance is believed to be influenced by a combination of genetic, environmental, psychological, and other factors. **Obesity** is measured by using a mathematical formula called a **body mass index (BMI)** – weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared ($BMI = kg/m^2$). A BMI of 19 to 25 is considered a “healthy weight target” and poses a minimal risk to your health, but a BMI higher than 26 begins to increase your risk for a variety of serious health problems. A BMI of 25 to 29.9 is considered overweight while 30 or above is considered obese.



Source: National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

HARMFUL EFFECTS OF OBESITY:

- Excessive amounts of body fat increase your risk of certain health conditions, such as coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, **dyslipidemia** (abnormal fat levels in the blood), diabetes, gallstones, **sleep apnea** (interrupted breathing during sleep), **osteoarthritis** (wearing away of the joints), and some types of cancer.

HOW TO LOWER YOUR WEIGHT AND YOUR HEALTH RISKS:

- Monitor what you eat. To prevent weight gain, the amount of calories you eat should not exceed the amount of energy you expend with physical activity.
- Get regular exercise; at least 30 minutes a day of activity equivalent to brisk walking is recommended.
- If you are overweight, losing as little as 5% to 10% of your body weight can improve your health. You should lose weight slowly; losing about 1 pound per week is a safe way to lose weight.
- Before considering any new diet or exercise regimen, discuss it first with your doctor.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- American Dietetic Association
800/366-1655 or www.eatright.org
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases Weight-Control Information Network (WIN)
800/WIN-8098 or www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/win.htm
- American Obesity Association
800/98-OBESE or www.obesity.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.

Additional Sources: National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, American Dietetic Association, *AMA's Encyclopedia of Medicine*

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