

Exercise and Obesity

Obesity is generally defined as the condition of weighing 20% or more over your ideal weight. You can find the ideal weight for your height and sex from a weight chart. In the United States, about one of every five men and one of every three women are obese.

The goal of treatment for obesity is weight loss. Exercise is an essential part of any weight-loss program and should become a permanent part of your lifestyle. The benefits of exercise can include:

- ▶ burning off calories and losing weight
- ▶ maintaining muscle tone
- ▶ increasing your metabolic rate (the amount of calories your body burns 24 hours a day)
- ▶ improving circulation
- ▶ improving heart and lung function
- ▶ increasing your sense of self-control
- ▶ reducing your level of stress
- ▶ increasing your ability to concentrate
- ▶ improving your appearance
- ▶ reducing depression
- ▶ suppressing your appetite
- ▶ helping you sleep better
- ▶ preventing diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

Some people can lose weight by themselves, but most should seek help from a health care provider. Your provider will check your pulse, blood pressure, and heart; ask about your medical history; and order lab tests if necessary.

Your health care provider may refer you to a dietitian to plan your diet. A dietitian can prepare a healthy diet that will help you lose 1 to 2 pounds a week.

Your health care provider will recommend the right kinds of exercise for you. Your health care provider may suggest that you:

- ▶ Walk every day.
- ▶ Take the stairs instead of the elevator.

- ▶ Do errands on foot, if possible. If you need to drive to run errands, park farther away and walk to your destination.
- ▶ Find a physical activity that is convenient and affordable for you and fits your lifestyle.
- ▶ Go to a spa, gym, or exercise class.
- ▶ Find a friend, coworker, or family member to exercise with.
- ▶ Exercise at the same time every day.

As you begin to exercise more, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- ▶ Your goal is to begin a routine of physical activity that can become an enjoyable part of your life.
- ▶ Choose activities you enjoy, can afford, and can fit into your schedule.
- ▶ Use a chart that shows how many calories are burned in different physical activities to get ideas for types of exercise.
- ▶ Consider bicycling, walking briskly, or exercising at home with videotapes if you don't like sports or gyms. (Many team sports—for example, bowling—do not provide the level of physical activity needed for the best results.)
- ▶ Build up slowly to a level of activity that makes you breathe more heavily, increases your heart rate, and makes you sweat. Do not do so much that you strain your muscles or feel dizzy or nauseated.
- ▶ Build up to exercising for 30 minutes a day, most days of the week. Thirty-minute workouts are good for cardiovascular health. Longer, more frequent workouts, such as brisk walking, are better for weight loss. You will benefit even if the 30 minutes of activity are done in three 10-minute periods a day. As you increase your total amount of physical activity, you increase your benefit.
- ▶ Do warm-up exercises or gentle stretches before exercising. Do cool-down exercises afterward.
- ▶ Wear proper shoes and loose-fitting clothing.
- ▶ Drink extra water or sports drinks such as Gatorade when you exercise strenuously or in hot weather.

To maintain your exercise program, follow these guidelines:

- ▶ Choose a form of exercise you enjoy.
- ▶ Avoid setting your expectations too high.
- ▶ Start out slowly and build your stamina gradually.
- ▶ Find a friend to exercise with.
- ▶ Make friends in your exercise class. Talk to the class instructor and ask for supervision if you need it.
- ▶ Avoid being competitive. Try to improve on your last effort instead of comparing yourself with someone else.
- ▶ Combine exercise with social activities, such as by joining a group.
- ▶ Avoid burnout and injury by taking 1 to 2 days off from workouts every week.
- ▶ Recover completely from illness before resuming exercise. Then start with less exercise and increase the amount you do gradually to avoid injury.
- ▶ Join in sports activities that benefit community or charity organizations.
- ▶ Remember that exercise needs to be continued throughout your life. Don't try to be too intense. Enjoy getting healthy.
- ▶ Have fun.