



dying from the fat of the land

Too Much of a Good Thing

As a nation, we are eating ourselves into early graves. The latest figures show that 31 percent of adults in this country are obese and another 33 percent are overweight. We simply eat too much and exercise too little. It's a trend that's been underway for decades.

In 2004 the average person consumed 205 calories a day in sugar and another 205 in high-fructose corn syrup, for a total of 410 calories per day. In 1970 he or she consumed 343 calories worth of sugar and only two calories worth of corn syrup. So, big deal, that's just 65 additional calories, right? Well, those additional 65 calories are enough to cause a seven-pound weight gain in one year!

And that's to say nothing of starches, fats and other components of our daily diet.



We're Cavemen (and Women) in a Fast Food World

Overeating wasn't a problem for our earliest ancestors. The opportunity to eat too much rarely presented itself, while the risk of too little food was constant. We're programmed to eat until we're full at every opportunity. Our bodies thriftily store any excess calories as fat, to be burned on those days when there isn't enough nourishment to be found. We now live in a world filled with high-calorie food and drink; the days when there isn't enough nourishment never come.

To compound the problem, the hormonal and neurological systems that alert our brains that we've had enough to eat are the same as those of our hunter-gatherer ancestors. And they're not up to the job. For example, they apparently don't respond accurately to the calorie content of dissolved sugar in soda and other sweetened beverages. The calories in a soft drink a day can add more than a pound of fat to your frame every month.

RESOURCES

Unbiased, non-commercial information and support for those battling obesity can be found at:

American Obesity Association: National advocacy group for those fighting obesity. <http://www.obesity.org>

Partnership for Healthy Weight Management: An association of major governmental, academic and commercial organizations offering information on obesity, with links to its members' Web sites. <http://www.consumer.gov/weightloss>

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Gluttons for punishment?

Obesity is threatening to outpace tobacco as the 21st century's most deadly avoidable health risk.

- An estimated 14 percent of deaths from cancer in men and 20 percent in women were attributable to obesity, accounting for 25 to 30 percent of colon, endometrial (uterus lining), kidney and esophageal cancers, and postmenopausal breast cancer. Obesity is also linked to gallbladder, ovarian and pancreatic cancers.
- Obesity is directly linked to heart attacks and congestive heart failure, and indirectly contributes to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes and arterial blockages that trigger heart attacks.
- A long-term study estimated that even among those who fall a few points short of obesity on the body mass index (BMI) scale, heart disease rates increased 50 percent for women and 72 percent for men.
- As weight increases, so does blood pressure. High blood pressure is the major culprit in strokes. A long-running Swedish study found that obesity alone nearly doubles the risk of stroke in otherwise healthy middle-aged men. A U.S. study computed that a one-unit increase in BMI raises stroke risk by six percent.

How to lose weight – guaranteed!

Eat less. Carbs, fat, sugar – to your body, it's the same thing: calories. Eat fewer calories than you burn and you'll lose weight.

Go for bulk. Foods high in fiber and water – fruits, vegetables, and whole grains – make you feel fuller.

Notice portion size. A "serving" is a very inexact concept. You might not automatically notice a 45 percent increase in the size of the helping of lasagna on your plate. But your body will. Prepackaged, frozen meals can help. Their portion size is fixed, and their calorie content is stated on the box.

Avoid sugary drinks. Remember what was said earlier: your appetite doesn't properly respond to their calorie content.



Keep a log. You may think you can recall exactly what you eat during the day. But you're fooling yourself. Write down everything. Many studies show that people who carefully log what they eat lose more than those who don't.

Weigh yourself at least once a week. Once a day isn't too often. It may be a bit discouraging at times, but you aren't going to be ambushed by a weight gain, either.

Exercise. Exercise is a necessary companion to proper diet. If you're greatly overweight, you'll have to start very slowly and build gradually. In the long run, your overall health will improve, you'll become more active, and you'll lose even more weight.

If you are seriously overweight, start your exercise program with a visit to your doctor to determine whether your excess weight has compromised your health in some way.

It's Never Too Late

Remember, Before you begin a diet and exercise program, visit a doctor first. Don't get discouraged. You have the rest of your life to achieve your weight-loss goals. And, the closer you come to achieving that goal, the longer your life will probably be.

Evaluate Your Weight with BMI

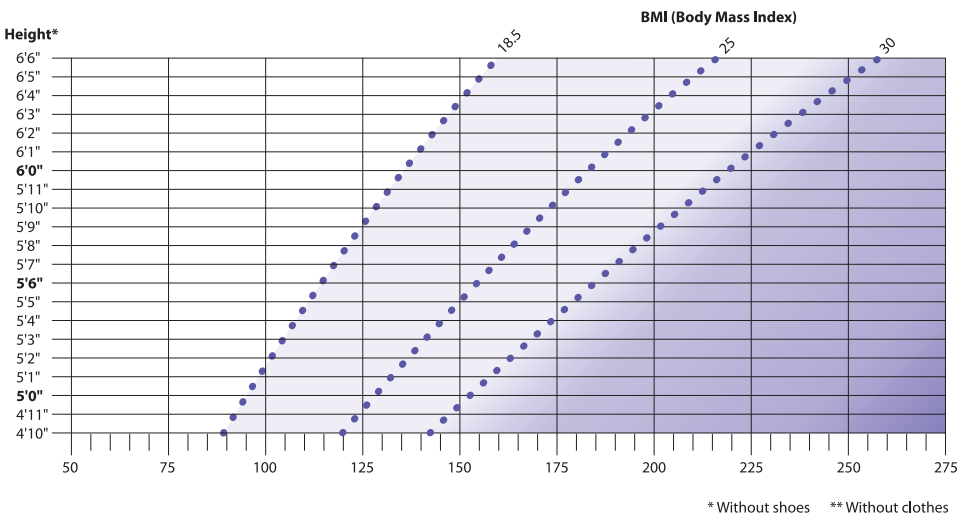
Body Mass Index (BMI) is a ratio of your body weight to your height. The formula for adults over age 20 is:

Anyone with a body mass index of 30 or more is likely to qualify as obese. Because BMI is simply a ratio of height to weight, it fails to compensate for the percentage of body weight composed of lean muscle, which is much more dense than fat. A heavily muscled athlete could have a BMI of 30 and not be overweight at all. And women, who normally have a higher body fat percentage than men, could have a BMI of 30 with relatively little health risk, so long as the fat was not concentrated in the stomach area.

Use the following formula to calculate your BMI:

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{Weight in Pounds}}{(\text{Height in inches} \times \text{Height in inches})} \times 703$$

BODY MASS INDEX CHART



Directions: Find your weight on the bottom of the graph. Go straight up from that point until you come to the line that matches your height. Then look to find your weight group.

- Healthy Weight BMI from 18.5 up to 25 refers to a healthy weight.
- Overweight BMI from 25 up to 30 refers to overweight.
- Obese BMI 30 or higher refers to obesity. Obese persons are also overweight.