

Northwest Gynecological Oncology

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HEALTHY WEIGHT

Keeping a healthy weight is good for your physical and mental well-being. Good eating habits and moderate exercise are crucial to keeping a healthy weight and a fit body.

Factors That Affect Weight

Every function of the body—from building cells to moving muscles—needs energy. Energy is measured in calories. Calories also measure how much fuel is in a certain food. The body uses only as much of its daily intake of food as it needs for energy. The energy that remains is stored as fat in the body. Fat normally makes up about 22–28% of a woman's body weight.

An average woman needs about 2,000 calories a day. Women who eat more than that and do not burn the extra calories in exercise are likely to gain weight. In addition to physical activity and eating habits, a number of other factors affect weight gain including age, metabolism and genetics.

Age

It is normal for women to gain a little weight as they grow older, especially after menopause. But gradual weight gain (even as little as 100 extra calories a day) can build up to an unhealthy weight.

Metabolism

Some women may have a hard time losing weight because of their metabolism—how their bodies use the energy found in foods they eat. Even if they do not overeat, they might find it hard to lose weight or keep a healthy weight if they do not exercise.

Genes

Genes may affect a person's weight directly or indirectly. Some people have genetic disorders that cause obesity. Others are at increased risk of becoming overweight or obese because of their genes.

What Is a Healthy Weight?

To stay healthy, you should keep your weight at the level that is best for your height. The Body Mass Index table compares a woman's height with her weight to see if she is overweight. Having a body mass index (BMI) of 19–24.9 is normal, and 25–29.9 is overweight. A person with a score of 30 or higher is obese. Nearly one third of adults in the United States have a BMI of 30 or greater.

Health Hazards of Being Overweight

Many health concerns relate to being obese or overweight. Sometimes being overweight may trigger conditions that lead to serious health problems including certain types of cancer, such as cancer of the endometrium, breast, colon, and gallbladder.

Weight Control

The best way to achieve and maintain a healthy weight is to balance the number of calories you eat and drink with the number you burn. For some people, maintaining a healthy weight may be harder than achieving it. Maintaining a healthy weight requires a life-long commitment to good nutrition and exercise.

When diet and exercise alone are not enough, your doctor may suggest medication or surgery to help reduce your weight. However, neither is a good option for you unless you are willing to commit to a lifestyle of balanced nutrition and physical activity afterwards.

Nutrition

A healthy diet should be the first step to weight loss. It is important to get the nutrients your body needs to grow, replace worn-out tissue, and provide energy. How much of each nutrient you need each day is called the recommended daily allowance (RDA) or, more recently, the dietary reference intake (DRI). To be sure that your diet gives you enough nutrients, you need to know which ones are in the foods you eat.

It is important to balance food and physical activity: getting more physical activity lets you eat more without gaining weight. The food pyramid developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, MyPyramid (www.mypyramid.gov), can help you plan a balanced diet. It takes into account your age, sex, and your amount of daily physical activity and shows the number of servings you should have each day from each of these six food groups:

- Grains
- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Oils
- Milk
- Meat and beans

Exercise

To be healthy, it is important to stay active. Regular exercise promotes health, mental well-being, and a healthy weight. Consider the following when setting your exercise goals:

To reduce risk of chronic disease, you need to exercise at least 30 minutes most days of the week.

To maintain your weight, you need to exercise 60 minutes most days of the week and not take in more calories than you burn.

To lose weight, you need to exercise 60 to 90 minutes most days of the week and take in fewer calories than you burn.

Getting enough physical activity does not mean that you have to enroll in a vigorous exercise program. Household chores and moderate exercise, for example, can help burn enough calories to control weight. If you are obese, older than age 50 years, or have a medical condition and have not exercised for a while, work with your doctor to ease into a safe exercise program.

Finally . . .

The key to weight control is a blend of good eating habits and regular exercise. Eat foods that are rich in nutrients, but low in calories. Choose exercise that you like, and vary it to get an overall workout. Talk to your doctor. He or she may suggest ways to help you lose weight and maintain a healthy weight. Make a balanced diet and exercise a long-term habit. You will enjoy the benefits for the rest of your life.