

Strategy: *Maintain your healthy body weight through a combination of exercise and diet that is right for you.*

Although numerous factors go into maintaining a healthy weight, essentially it boils down to an equation of calories taken in via the foods we eat and calories burned through physical activity. In most cases, losing weight is essentially about eating less and moving more.

In Canada, food (particularly high calorie food), is easy to get, and statistics show that many Canadians live lifestyles that are low in physical activity. Thus, these days, maintaining a healthy weight can be challenging for many of us.

Benefits of a Healthy Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight reduces your risk for developing a number of diseases and health problems including:

- Heart attacks and strokes (coronary heart disease)
- Type 2 Diabetes
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Sleep apnea
- Certain cancers (e.g., colon, breast, endometrial)
- Gall bladder disease
- Osteoarthritis

Maintaining a healthy body weight also helps us to feel better both physically and mentally.

What exactly is a healthy body weight?

Health Canada uses two primary indicators to assess whether or not a person is overweight: Body Mass Index (BMI) and waist circumference.

Body Mass Index is a measure that uses a person's height and weight to estimate body fat. A BMI figure falling within the 25 to 29.9 range indicates someone who is overweight and a BMI of 30 or greater indicates someone who is obese.

You can calculate your BMI using online tools. Here is a link to one of them, the Canadian Diabetes Association's BMI calculator:

<http://www.diabetes.ca/diabetes-and-you/nutrition/bmi/>

Waist circumference is also used as an indicator of weight-related risk factors because fat carried around the waistline carries more risk for heart disease than fat that is on the hips and thighs (Heart and Stroke Foundation). According to Health Canada's "Guidelines for Body Weight Classification in Adults," a waist circumference of more than 40 inches in men, and over 35 inches in women raises the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Waist circumference is usually measured several inches above the top of the pants, so your pant waist size is *not* considered an accurate measure of waist circumference. To

read the Heart and Stroke Foundation's instructions for taking a proper waist measurement, click here:

<http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.iklQLcMWJtE/b.3876195/> .

Weight Interacts with Other Risk Factors

Obviously, weight is not the only factor related to cardiovascular and other health risks. Factors such as your age, gender, diet, amount of physical activity, and whether or not you smoke, also affect your risk of health problems and will also have an impact on the degree to which your weight is a risk factor.

For example, according to Health Canada, the risks associated with being overweight are decreased if you are a non-smoker, physically active and eat nutritiously.

Achieving a Healthy Weight

Exercise

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada 63 percent of Canadians are not active enough to achieve the health benefits from physical activity.

Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Living outlines three types of physical activity:

- Endurance activities such as jogging, aerobics, walking, or dancing
- Flexibility activities such as stretching or yoga
- Strength building activities such as lifting weights or calisthenics

The amount of physical activity an individual needs may vary depending on age, health status and amount of daily physical activity. But experts now recommend that most people need at least 60 minutes of activity each day, in periods of at least ten minutes each (Public Health Agency of Canada).

To read more about Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Living, link to:

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pag-gap/index-home-accueil-eng.php>

Get Moving!

While exercise is important, it's not the only kind of physical activity that matters in terms of maintaining a healthy weight. Other kinds of activity like raking leaves and getting out of your chair to walk around the house during television commercials, burn calories and provide some of the same benefits as structured exercise. Some research has shown that wearing a pedometer, a device which measures the number of steps a person takes, helps motivate people to dramatically increase the number of steps they take each day, resulting in a reduced BMI and lower blood pressure (Bravata). The Public Health Agency of Canada Web site offers a number of tips for building more physical activity into various aspects of your daily life at:

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pag-gap/profiles/athome-maison-eng.php>

The Problem with Diets

Many Canadians have tried various popular diets in an effort to lose weight. Yet, research shows that while people on diets sometimes lose weight, they usually gain it back again. Psychologist Traci Mann, lead author of a study which reviewed 31 studies on the long term impact of dieting sums up her findings as follows, "Diets do not lead to sustained weight loss or health benefits for the majority of people. We found that the majority of people regained all the weight, plus more."

Healthy Weight is About Lifestyle Change

So, the key to reaching and maintaining a healthy weight is really about developing new eating and exercise habits that you can stick to over the long term. Here are some ideas:

- **Walk more.** Walk to the store more often. Park further away from the entrance to the shopping mall. Park your car, or get off the bus a little further from your destination. Wear a pedometer to see how far you walk in a day.
- **Start moving.** While almost any type of physical activity burns calories, exercise is uniquely important for health. However, what constitutes an appropriate daily exercise routine can vary depending on your age and health status. Your family doctor, or a fitness professional, can help you design an exercise program that is right for you.
- **Eat less food away from home.** Restaurant meals are often much higher in salt and fat than the meals we cook at home, and tend to come in bigger portions with lots of calories. It's easier to regulate portion size, salt content and calories when we eat at home.
- **Eat breakfast.** Research shows that people who skip breakfast tend to consume more calories per day.
- **Analyze your diet.** Look for certain high calorie foods you can cut down on or eat less of on a regular basis.
- **Fill at least half your plate with fruits and vegetables and whole grains.** Eating more of these foods has been linked to numerous health benefits. With respect to maintaining a healthy weight, fruits and vegetables have very little fat and tend to be lower in calories than snack foods like crackers, chips and soft drinks. So, filling up on an apple, rather than a couple of cookies, is a good healthy weight strategy.

Dietitians Canada has an online tool that helps you track your daily eating and physical activity level and compare them to Health Canada's recommendations. The site provides

an assessment tool (including a BMI calculator) which helps you determine your personal risk factors related to weight and activity level. Click here for more information:

http://www.dietitians.ca/public/content/eat_well_live_well/english/eatracker/#.

Modest Improvements Make a Big Difference

Losing weight and keeping it off can be challenging, but remember that even losing as little as 10 pounds can make a difference. For example, if your height is 5'9" and your weight is 185 lbs, your BMI is 27.3. This BMI indicates you are moderately overweight. If you then lose ten pounds, your BMI goes down to 25.8, which is just over the upper limit of what is considered a normal BMI. Some research has also shown that losing five to ten percent of your body weight, a relatively attainable goal for most people, can lead to health benefits such as lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels (Blackburn).

Maintaining a healthy weight has multiple benefits apart from reducing the risk of heart attack, stroke and other diseases. A study of individuals who were successful at losing significant amounts of weight and keeping it off (Klem) found that people reported improvements not only in physical health, but also in their energy levels, physical mobility, general mood and self-confidence.

Resources:

Canada's Food Guide:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/basics-base/index-eng.php>

Health Canada's Canadian Guidelines for Body Weight Classification in Adults:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/weights-poids/guide-ld-adult/ga-gr-pub-eng.php>

Why a healthy waist?, Heart and Stroke Foundation:

<http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.iklQLcMWJtE/b.3876195/>

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