

Top Questions About Healthy Weight and Women

What is a healthy weight? The answer is different for everyone. It's important to know what a healthy weight is for you. Your weight — whether too high or too low — can affect your ability to get pregnant or can cause problems during pregnancy. Women often gain and lose weight differently, so the steps you need to take to lose weight may be different from the steps someone else needs to take.

Q: How do I know if I'm at a healthy weight?

A: You can use the body mass index (BMI) to find out whether your weight is in a healthy or unhealthy range. BMI is a tool that uses your height and weight to estimate body fat.

Another way to figure out if you have a healthy weight is to measure your waist circumference (the distance around your waist). Women with a waist circumference larger than 35 inches are at higher risk for many health problems caused by overweight or obesity.

Q: What are the health effects for women who are at an unhealthy weight?

A: Underweight, overweight, and obesity raise your risk for many serious health problems:

- **Menstrual cycle problems.** Losing too much weight can cause periods to be less regular or stop completely.
- **Osteoporosis.** Underweight increases your risk of osteoporosis, a condition that causes bones to become weak and break easily.
- **Depression.** Studies show that depression is more common in women who are underweight than women who are at a healthy weight.

- **Breathing problems.** Women who have overweight or obesity may develop sleep apnea.
- **Cancer.** Women who have overweight or obesity are more at risk for 13 different kinds of cancer.
- **Diabetes.** Extra weight makes you twice as likely to get diabetes.
- **Heart and brain problems.** Overweight and obesity increase your risks for heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.
- **Pregnancy problems.** If you have underweight, overweight, or obesity, it may be more difficult to get pregnant. Overweight and obesity can also cause complications during pregnancy.

Q: What can make it more likely that I'll gain weight?

A: Things that can affect your weight include:

- **Genes and family background.** Obesity tends to run in families. But there is not one “fat” gene.
- **Metabolism.** A woman's metabolism (how fast the body “burns” calories) may change throughout her life, such as with the hormonal changes that happen during puberty, pregnancy, and menopause.
- **Age.** Your metabolism may slow down as you get older.
- **Trauma.** Women who experience serious negative events during childhood, such as abuse, are more likely to have obesity as adults.

- **Medicines.** Some medicines, such as those for mental health conditions, sleep, and high blood pressure, can cause weight gain or make it difficult to lose weight.
- **Sleep.** Not getting enough high-quality sleep can lead to weight gain.

Q: What are some tips for successful weight loss?

A: How quickly you gain or lose weight can be very different from other people based on your specific genes, biology, and past. Try some or all of the following tips to help:

- Set realistic goals. Talk to your doctor or nurse about your goals and ways to achieve them.
- Plan your meals ahead of time, and cook more at home.
- Focus on eating healthy foods. Getting calories mostly from lean protein, whole grains, and fruits and vegetables may help you lose weight safely.

- Track your food and fitness. Include the calories that you drink each day.
- Limit screen time. Get moving instead!
- Make sure you get enough sleep, and manage stress, which can make weight gain more likely.

Q: When should I talk to a doctor or nurse about my weight?

A: If you are worried about your weight, or if you have underweight, overweight, or obesity, talk to your doctor or nurse.

Your doctor or nurse will ask you questions and may do tests to learn more about what is causing your weight gain or loss. Your doctor or nurse may suggest healthy eating changes and physical activity to help you reach a healthy weight.

For more information...

For more information about healthy weight, call the OWH Helpline at 1-800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HHS

1-800-232-4636 • www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/losing_weight/index.html

U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Information Center

301-504-5755 • www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/weight-and-obesity

ChooseMyPlate.gov

www.choosemyplate.gov/physical-activity.html

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), NIH, HHS

1-800-860-8747 • www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/communication-programs/win

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