



The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
FAQ064  
WOMEN'S HEALTH

## Weight Control: Eating Right and Keeping Fit

- **What causes weight gain?**
- **What is a healthy weight?**
- **What are some health hazards of being overweight?**
- **How can you achieve and maintain a healthy weight?**
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### What causes weight gain?

An average woman needs about 2,000 calories a day. Women who eat more than this amount and who 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:

- Age
- Pregnancy
- **Metabolism**
- Growth
- **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 (BMI) compares a woman's height with her weight to see if she is overweight. Having a 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. To calculate your BMI, go to <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>.

### What are some health hazards of being overweight?

Being overweight can increase the risk of serious health problems:

- High **cholesterol** levels
- Diabetes
- **Cardiovascular disease** and high blood pressure
- Gallbladder disease
- Certain types of cancer, such as cancer of the **endometrium**, breast, colon, and gallbladder
- **Sleep apnea**

- Musculoskeletal disease (damage to joints)
- **Infertility**

### How can you achieve and maintain a healthy weight?

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 lifelong commitment to good nutrition and exercise.

When diet and exercise alone are not enough, your health care provider 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.

### How can I plan meals to lose excess weight?

A healthy diet should be the first step to weight loss (see the FAQ [Healthy Eating](#)). It is important to get the **nutrients** your body needs to replace worn-out tissue and provide energy. How much of each nutrient you need each day is called the dietary reference intake (DRI).

The web site developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, ChooseMyPlate.gov ([www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.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 of different kinds of foods.

### How much exercise do I need to stay healthy, maintain my weight, or lose weight?

Consider the following when setting your exercise goals:

- If you want to reduce your risk of chronic disease, you need to exercise at least 30 minutes most days of the week.
- If you want to maintain your weight, you need to exercise 60 minutes most days of the week and not take in more calories than you burn.
- If you want to lose weight, you need to exercise 60–90 minutes most days of the week and take in fewer calories than you burn.

### When is therapy with medication appropriate to help lose weight?

For some people, it may be hard to lose weight only through diet and exercise. If a person has a BMI greater than 30, or a BMI of at least 27 with certain medical conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease, it is possible that medication will help with weight loss. It will be used in addition to diet and lifestyle changes. These medications should be used only under a health care provider's supervision.

### When is surgery an option to help lose weight?

If all other options fail, a special type of surgery, bariatric surgery, may be an option for people who are very obese. For this surgery, bands or staples are used to close off part of the stomach. It alters the size of your stomach and changes the way your body digests and absorbs food.

### What are the risks associated with bariatric surgery?

The risks of bariatric surgery include the following:

- Leaking of stomach juices into the abdomen
- Injury to other organs, such as the spleen
- Wearing away of the band or staples used in the surgery
- Infection
- Complications from **anesthesia**
- Death

### What factors should I think about if I am considering weight-loss surgery?

This surgery may have long-term effects on your body, such as changes in bowel habits and eating patterns. You should not have this surgery unless you are serious about lifestyle changes, such as regular exercise, dietary restrictions, and taking vitamin and mineral supplements. You also must be willing to commit to lifelong medical follow-up.

### Glossary

**Anesthesia:** Relief of pain by loss of sensation.

**Cardiovascular Disease:** Disease of the heart and blood vessels.

**Cholesterol:** A natural substance that serves as a building block for cells and hormones and helps to carry fat through the blood vessels for use or storage in other parts of the body.

**Endometrium:** The lining of the uterus.

**Genes:** DNA “blueprints” that code for specific traits, such as hair and eye color.

**Infertility:** A condition in which a couple has been unable to get pregnant after 12 months without the use of any form of birth control.

**Metabolism:** The physical and chemical processes in the body that maintain life.

**Nutrients:** Nourishing substances supplied through food, such as vitamins and minerals.

**Sleep Apnea:** A condition in which a person repeatedly stops breathing during sleep.

**If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.**

**FAQ064:** Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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