

ARE YOU AT A *healthy* WEIGHT?

Overweight

A healthy weight is important for a long, vigorous life. Yet approximately half of all women in the United States are overweight or obese (extremely overweight). The more overweight a woman is, the higher her risk for heart disease. Overweight also increases the risks for stroke, congestive heart failure, gallbladder disease, arthritis, and breathing problems, as well as breast, colon, and other cancers. If you are overweight, you are more likely to develop heart disease even if you have no other risk factors. Being overweight also appears to contribute to heart disease by increasing the chances of developing other major risk factors, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high blood cholesterol. The bottom line: Maintaining a healthy weight is an extremely important part of heart disease prevention. It can help to protect your health—and even save your life.

Should You Choose to Lose?

Do you need to lose weight to reduce your risk of heart disease? You can find out by taking three simple steps. First, take a look at the Body Mass Index chart below. It will tell you if your weight is within the range suggested for people of your height. You'll notice that your weight in relation to your height gives you a number called a "Body Mass Index" (BMI). A BMI from 18.5 to 24.9 indicates a normal weight. A person with a BMI from 25 to 29.9 is overweight, while someone with a BMI of 30 or higher is obese. Those in the "overweight" or "obese" categories have a higher risk of heart disease.

Body Mass Index

Here is a chart for men and women that gives the body mass index (BMI) for various heights and weights*.

BODY MASS INDEX

	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
4'10"	100	105	110	115	119	124	129	134	138	143	148
5'	107	112	118	123	128	133	138	143	148	153	158
5'1"	111	116	122	127	132	137	143	148	153	158	164
5'3"	118	124	130	135	141	146	152	158	163	169	175
5'5"	126	132	138	144	150	156	162	168	174	180	186
5'7"	134	140	146	153	159	166	172	178	185	191	198
5'9"	142	149	155	162	169	176	182	189	196	203	209
6'	150	157	165	172	179	186	193	200	208	215	222
6'1"	159	166	174	182	189	197	204	212	219	227	235
6'3"	168	176	184	192	200	208	216	224	232	240	248

* Weight is measured with underwear but no shoes.

What Does Your BMI Mean?

Categories:

- **Normal weight: BMI = 18.5 -24.9.** Good for you! Try not to gain weight.
- **Overweight: BMI = 25-29.9.** Do not gain any weight, especially if your waist measurement is high. You need to lose weight if you have two or more risk factors for heart disease and are overweight, or have a high waist measurement.
- **Obese: BMI = 30 or greater.** You need to lose weight. Lose weight slowly—about 1/2 to 2 pounds a week. See your doctor or a nutritionist if you need help

Source: *Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults, The Evidence Report, National Heart, Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institutes of Health, NIH Publication 98-4083, June 1998.*

The second step is to take your waist measurement. For women, a waist measurement of over 35 inches increases the risk of heart disease as well as the risks of high blood pressure, diabetes, and other serious health conditions. To measure your waist correctly, stand and place a tape measure around your middle, just above your hipbones. Measure your waist just after you breathe out. The final step in determining your need to lose weight is to find out your other risk factors for heart disease. It is important to know whether you have any of the following: high blood pressure, high LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol, high triglycerides, high blood glucose (blood sugar), a family history of early heart disease, physical inactivity, or cigarette smoking. Being age 55 or older, or having gone through menopause, also are heart disease risk factors. If you have a condition known as metabolic syndrome (see page __), your risk of heart disease is particularly high. If you aren't sure whether you have some of these risk factors, consult with your doctor. Once you have taken these three steps—found out your BMI, your waist measurement, and your other heart disease risk factors—you can use the information to decide if you need to take off pounds. While you should talk with your doctor about whether you should lose weight, keep these guidelines in mind:

- ♥ If you are overweight or obese AND have two or more other risk factors, you should lose weight.
- ♥ If you are overweight, have a waist measurement of over 35 inches AND have two or more other risk factors, you should lose weight.

If you are overweight BUT do not have a high waist measurement and have fewer than two other risk factors, you should avoid further weight gain.

Small Changes Make a Big Difference

If you need to lose weight, here is some good news: A small weight loss—just 5 to 10 percent of your current weight—will help to lower your risks of heart disease and other serious medical disorders. The best way to take off pounds is to do so gradually, by eating a balanced diet that is lower in calories and fat, and by getting more physical activity. (High-fat foods contain more calories than the same amount of other foods, so they can make it hard for you to avoid excess calories. But be careful—“lowfat” doesn't always mean low in calories. Sometimes extra sugars are added to lowfat desserts, for example.) For some women at very high risk, medication also may be necessary. To develop a weight-loss or weight-maintenance program that works best for you, consult with your doctor, registered dietitian or qualified nutritionist. For ideas on how to lose weight safely *and* keep it off, see “Aim for a Healthy Weight” on page __.

Physical Inactivity

Physical inactivity raises your risk of heart disease—more than you might think. It boosts your chances of developing heart-related problems even if you have no other risk factors. It also increases the likelihood that you will develop other heart disease risk factors, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and overweight. Yet most women aren't getting enough physical activity. According to the Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health, 60 percent of women in the United States don't get the recommended amount of physical activity. More than 25 percent of women are not active at all during their free time. Physical inactivity is especially common among African-American and Hispanic women. Besides raising the risk of heart disease, lack of physical activity leads to more doctor visits, hospitalizations, and use of medicines for a variety of illnesses.

For older women, physical inactivity also increases the risk of osteoporosis, which in turn may increase the risk of broken bones. This is worrisome, since women tend to become less physically active as they get older. Fortunately, research shows that as little as 30 minutes of moderate activity on most, and preferably all, days of the week helps to protect heart health. This level of activity can reduce your risk of heart disease as well as lower your chances of having a stroke, colon cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other medical problems. Examples of moderate activity are taking a brisk walk, raking leaves, housecleaning, or gardening. If you prefer, you can divide your 30-minute activity into shorter periods of at least 10 minutes each. To find out about easy, enjoyable ways to boost your activity level, see “Learn New Moves” on page __.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke. About 65 percent of people who have diabetes die of some type of cardiovascular disease. Diabetic women are at especially high risk for dying of heart disease and stroke. Today, about 9 million women in the United States have diabetes, including an estimated 3 million women who do not even know they have the disease.

The type of diabetes that most commonly develops in adulthood is type 2 diabetes. In type 2 diabetes, the pancreas makes insulin but the body cannot use it properly and gradually loses the ability to produce it. Type 2 diabetes is a serious disease. In addition to increasing the risk for heart disease, it is the number one cause of kidney failure, blindness, and lower limb amputation in adults. Diabetes can also lead to nerve damage and difficulties in fighting infection. The risk of type 2 diabetes rises after the age of 45. You are much more likely to develop this disease if you are overweight, especially if you have extra weight around your middle. Other risk factors include physical inactivity and a family history of diabetes. Type 2 diabetes also is more common among American Indians, Hispanic Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific

Islanders. Women who have had diabetes during pregnancy (gestational diabetes) or gave birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds are at increased risk for type II diabetes later in life.

Symptoms of diabetes may include fatigue, nausea, frequent urination, unusual thirst, weight loss, blurred vision, frequent infections and slow healing of sores. But type 2 diabetes develops gradually and sometimes has no symptoms. Even if you have no symptoms of diabetes, if you are overweight and have any of the risk factors for type 2 diabetes, ask your health care provider about getting tested for it. If you have diabetes, controlling your blood glucose levels will help prevent complications. Because diabetes is so strongly linked with heart disease, managing diabetes must include keeping certain risk factors under control (see “The ABCs of Diabetes Control” on page __). Recommended levels of blood pressure and blood cholesterol control are lower for people with diabetes than for the general population.

Not smoking, being physically active, and taking aspirin daily (if your doctor recommends it) also are important to prevent heart disease if you have diabetes. Some people do not yet have diabetes, but are at high risk for developing the disease. They have a condition known as “pre-diabetes,” in which blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not yet in the diabetic range. But new research shows that many people with pre-diabetes can prevent or delay the development of diabetes by making modest changes in diet and level of physical activity (see “Preventing Diabetes” on page __). People who are pre-diabetic also have a 50 percent greater chance of having a heart attack or stroke than those with normal blood glucose levels. So they should pay close attention to preventing or controlling blood pressure, blood cholesterol, and other risk factors for heart disease.