

Learning About Healthy Weight

What is a healthy weight?

A healthy weight is the weight at which you feel good about yourself and have energy for work and play. It's also one that lowers your risk for health problems.

What can you do to stay at a healthy weight?

It can be hard to stay at a healthy weight, especially when fast food, vending-machine snacks, and processed foods are so easy to find. And with your busy lifestyle, activity may be low on your list of things to do. But staying at a healthy weight may be easier than you think.

Here are some dos and don'ts for staying at a healthy weight:

Do eat healthy foods

The kinds of foods you eat have a big impact on both your weight and your health. Reaching and staying at a healthy weight is not about going on a diet. It's about making healthier food choices every day and changing your diet for good.

Healthy eating means eating a variety of foods so that you get all the nutrients you need. Your body needs protein, carbohydrate, and fats for energy. They keep your heart beating, your brain active, and your muscles working.

On most days, try to eat from each food group. This means eating a variety of:

- Whole grains, such as whole wheat breads and pastas.
- Fruits and vegetables.
- Dairy products, such as low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- Lean proteins, such as all types of fish, chicken without the skin, and beans.

Don't have too much or too little of one thing. All foods, if eaten in moderation, can be part of healthy eating. Even sweets can be okay.

If your favorite foods are high in fat, salt, sugar, or calories, limit how often you eat them. Eat smaller servings, or look for healthy substitutes.

Do watch what you eat

Many people eat more than their bodies need. Part of staying at a healthy weight means learning how much food you really need from day to day and not eating more than that. Even with healthy foods, eating too much can make you gain weight.

Having a well-balanced diet means that you eat enough, but not too much, and that your food gives you the nutrients you need to stay healthy. So listen to your body. Eat when you're hungry. Stop when you feel satisfied.

It's a good idea to have healthy snacks ready for when you get hungry. Keep healthy snacks with you at work, in your car, and at home. If you have a healthy snack easily available, you'll be less likely to pick a candy bar or bag of chips from a vending machine instead.

Some healthy snacks you might want to keep on hand are fruit, low-fat yogurt, string cheese, low-fat microwave popcorn, raisins and other dried fruit, nuts, whole wheat crackers, pretzels, carrots, celery sticks, and broccoli.

Do some physical activity

A big part of reaching and staying at a healthy weight is being active.

When you're active, you burn calories. This makes it easier to reach and stay at a healthy weight. When you're active on a regular basis, your body burns more calories, even when you're at rest. Being active helps you lose fat and build lean muscle.

Try to be active for at least 1 hour every day. This may sound like a lot, but it's okay to be active in smaller blocks of time that add up to 1 hour a day. Any activity that makes your heart beat faster and keeps it there for a while counts. A brisk walk, run, or swim will get your heart beating faster. So will climbing stairs, shooting baskets, or cycling. Even some household chores like vacuuming and mowing the lawn will get your heart rate up.

Pick activities that you enjoy—ones that make your heart beat faster, your muscles stronger, and your muscles and joints more flexible. If you find more than one thing you like doing, do them all. You don't have to do the same thing every day.

Don't diet

Diets don't work.

Diets are temporary. Because you give up so much when you diet, you may be hungry and think about food all the time. And after you stop dieting, you also may overeat to make up for what you missed. Most people who diet end up gaining back the pounds they lost—and more.

Remember that healthy bodies come in lots of shapes and sizes. Everyone can get healthier by eating better and being more active.

Where can you learn more?

Health education classes are available to all UC Davis patients for free. If you would like to take a class related to heart health, diabetes or many other conditions, check out our website <http://livinghealthy.ucdavis.edu>. Choose the “Education Classes” link on the left menu and see our complete schedule of classes.

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