



# Why Should I Lose Weight?

People who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop heart disease and stroke, even if they have no other risk factors.

Obesity is unhealthy because excess weight puts more strain on your heart. It can raise blood pressure and cholesterol and can lead to diabetes. Losing weight is one of the best ways to reduce your risk of heart problems and other diseases.



## How can I lose weight?

It's easy to start a diet or exercise plan. Staying on one is harder! Prepare yourself by setting goals, thinking ahead to roadblocks along the way, and deciding how to deal with them.

Talk to a nutritionist or registered dietitian about creating an eating plan that's right for you. It's never wise to follow fad diets, go without eating, or try to lose weight too fast.

- **Think about your eating habits.** Do you tend to mindlessly eat in front of the television at night? Do you skip breakfast and then eat a large lunch? Reflecting on your current habits can give you ideas on creating new healthy habits.
- **Be more active.** Getting more exercise is not just good for your heart, it can help you lose weight too.
- **Decide how to handle temptation.** When you're offered high-calorie foods, turn them down nicely, but firmly. Look up restaurant menus before you go out to eat so you can make a plan that fits in your diet.
- **Plan ahead.** If a bad mood, stress or boredom makes you want to eat a lot, decide in advance what action

to take. You could take up a new hobby, go for a walk, call a friend or read a book.

- **Be realistic and expect setbacks.** If you go off your diet, don't quit. Just get back on track.

## How should I change my eating habits?

- Eat slowly, take smaller portions and avoid "seconds."
- Eat a few light meals each day instead of one main meal. Don't skip meals.
- Choose a variety of healthy foods like fruit, vegetables, whole-grains, dried peas and beans, low-fat dairy products, fish, skinless poultry, lean meat and nuts.
- Cook foods in healthier ways like baking, boiling, broiling, grilling, roasting or stewing. Don't fry foods in oil.
- Read food labels and avoid foods that are high in added sugars, saturated and *trans* fats, sodium and calories.
- Avoid pastries, sugar-sweetened beverages, candy bars, pies and cakes.

(continued)



- Drink lots of water.
- Limit alcohol and other high-calorie drinks.

### How can physical activity help?

Physical activity is as important as your diet in helping you lose weight! Regular physical activity helps lower your risk of heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure and other health problems. If you have a chronic condition and want to greatly increase your physical activity level, ask your doctor or health professional for a physical activity plan that's right for you.

For overall cardiovascular health, adults should get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity each week, as well as muscle-strengthening activity at least two days per week. You may need more exercise to reach your weight loss goals. Increase your amount of physical activity gradually over time and decrease your caloric intake to a point where your input and output can achieve energy balance.



### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

### Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**How much weight should I lose?**

**What type of physical activity is best for me?**

### My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.