

Diet & Your Health Alert

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A Weighty Health Problem: Two-Thirds of Americans Carry Too Many Pounds

The United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and its National Institutes of Health have launched a public education campaign to make people aware of the health risks

of being overweight—a burgeoning problem in the United States and around the world.

A study by HHS' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, March 10, 2004)

shows that deaths due to poor diet and physical inactivity rose by 33% over the past decade and may soon overtake tobacco as the leading preventable cause of death.

An estimated 129.6 million Americans, or 64%, are overweight

or obese. These conditions increase the risk of type 2, or adult-onset, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and other medical problems.

Obesity, defined as a body mass index (height-to-weight ratio) of
(continued on page 3)

Losing Weight: Low-Fat or Low-Carb — Which Diets Work?

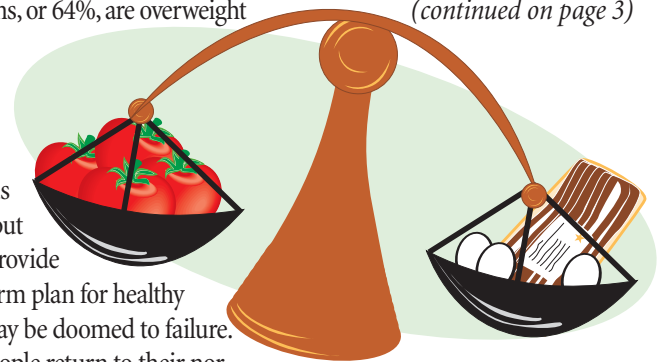
Americans are peppered with products and programs aimed at helping them lose weight. Some sound, and are, too good to be true (and a number have been federally cited for false advertising claims). The truth is that there is a “simple” formula—easier said than done—for losing weight: burn more calories than you eat each day.

The good news is that a wide

range of strategies can work for various individuals. We may want a simple solution to extra pounds, but the key lies in complexity. What we eat and drink interacts within our bodies in complex ways. To eat for good health requires a variety of food choices.

In the past, people may have lost weight on diet fads such as the “grapefruit diet” or the “cabbage soup diet.” But any short-term diet

that sheds pounds but doesn't provide a long-term plan for healthy eating may be doomed to failure. When people return to their normal eating patterns, the weight often returns. The “yo-yo” diet pattern of alternate weight loss and regain can actually alter metabolism, letting you burn fewer calories and making it harder to



lose weight the next time.

Low-Fat or Low-Carb?

Currently sweeping the nation are low-carbohydrate diets,
(continued on page 3)

Overweight and Cancer

American Cancer Society researchers published a major study linking excess weight to cancer in 2003 (*New England Journal of Medicine*, April 24, 2003). The largest study of its kind, it followed 900,000 healthy people for 16 years and analyzed the relation of body mass index to the risk of cancer deaths.

The report concluded that current patterns of overweight and obesity in the United States could account for 14% of all cancer deaths in men and 20% of those in women—approximately 90,000 cancer deaths a year that could be prevented if people maintained a healthy

body weight.

The research confirmed previous, smaller studies linking overweight and obesity to breast cancer in postmenopausal women and cancers of the colon and rectum, uterus, kidney, esophagus and gallbladder.

Obesity, for example, doubles a woman's risk of developing and dying of breast cancer.

The study also identified sever-

al types of cancer not previously linked with unhealthy weight: cervical and ovarian cancer; cancer of the stomach (in men), liver, pancreas and prostate; and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and multiple myeloma.

Avoid Weight Gain to Reduce Breast Cancer Risk

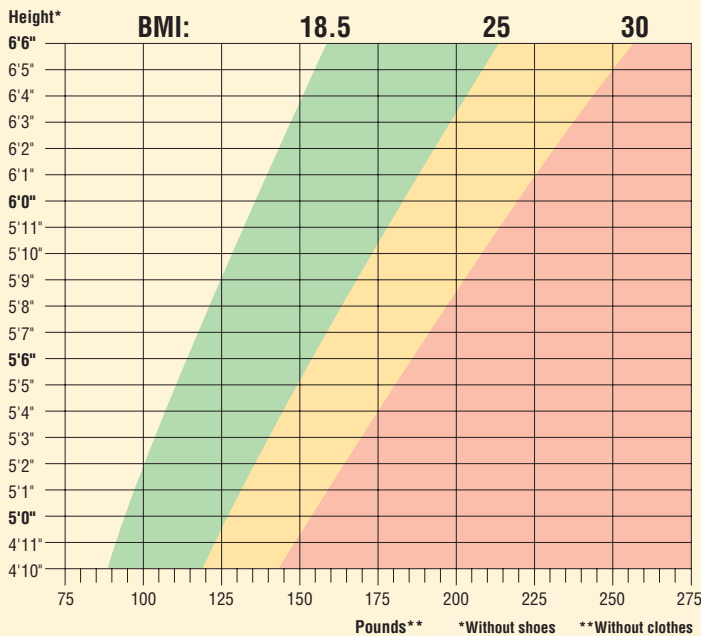
A separate American Cancer

Society study (*Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention*, February 2004) concludes that avoiding weight gain is one of the few ways to reduce breast cancer risk among postmenopausal women.

The seven-year study followed 62,756 women between ages 50 to 74. After adjusting for other risk factors, the study found that
(continued on page 2)

Provided as a community service by Fox Chase Cancer Center, one of the country's comprehensive cancer centers designated by the National Cancer Institute, this publication is not intended to replace personal medical advice. Please consult your doctor about your individual health needs. For information about cancer prevention, detection and treatment programs, call 1-888-FOX CHASE or visit our web site, www.fccc.edu.

Find Your Body Mass Index (BMI)



Source: Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2000.

Find your weight on the bottom of the chart and go straight up from that point to the line that matches your height to find your BMI range.

BMI ranges shown are for adults. Though not exact measures of healthy and unhealthy weights, the higher your BMI range, the greater your risk of health problems. Even with a healthy BMI, weight gains and excess abdominal fat may carry health risks for adults.

Overweight and Cancer (continued from page 1)

women who had gained 21 to 30 pounds after age 18 were 40% more likely to get breast cancer than those who gained five pounds or less. Women who had gained more than 70 pounds had double the risk of breast cancer.

Being overweight was already a known risk factor for breast cancer, but this study shed additional light. Weight gain did not appear to increase the risk among women using hormone replacement therapy—itsself a risk factor for breast cancer. Among women not using HRT, increased body fat appeared to raise risk by increasing natural levels of the hormone estrogen.

Healthy Diet Tips

The traditional **Mediterranean diet**, which emphasizes olive oil along with abundant vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and whole-grain breads, pastas and cereals, has long been renowned for helping achieve low rates of heart disease in Greece, southern Italy and southern France and parts of North Africa and the Middle East.

A recent study finds that sticking close to this diet reduces risks of cancer as well as heart disease. This was one result of the largest study

about their eating habits.

Greeks eat twice as many vegetables as Americans—nearly a pound a day. While olive oil alone didn't seem to make a difference, the Mediterranean diet also has a higher ratio of monounsaturated fats, such as olive and canola oil, compared to saturated fats. This might explain why Asians using monounsaturated cooking oils and lots of produce with little saturated fat also have lower rates of heart disease and many cancers.

Mediterranean Diet Tips

- ▶ Fill your plate with fresh fruits and vegetables—low in calories and fat and rich in cancer-fighting nutrients.
- ▶ If you're dining out Italian style, choose meals with little cream or cheese.
- ▶ Choose breads and pastas made with whole grains and flours. Foods with refined flour cause blood sugar levels to spike because they are so easily digested.

French food is known for its richness, including lavish use of fats. Yet the French are generally less overweight than Americans. Compared to the one-third of Americans who are obese, only 8% of French are, according to the National Institute of Health and Medical Research in Paris.

French Diet Tips

- ▶ Give mealtimes their full flavor as an event of the day. Eat slowly, not on the run. You'll feel full after eating less and enjoy it more.



ever done on the Mediterranean diet (*New England Journal of Medicine*, June 26, 2003). Despite the often-claimed advantage of olive oil, another conclusion was that no single food type was associated with the decreased risk but rather the diet as a whole.

Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health and the University of Athens Medical School followed more than 22,000 adults for four years with periodic, detailed questionnaires

... from Around the World

▶ Avoid snacking. The French rarely do. The less often you eat, the fewer calories you consume, according to studies on snacking.

▶ If you must snack, do it wisely. Resist calorie-loaded vending machine fare by having fresh or dried fruit, low-cal drinks or soups, fat-free yogurt or high-fiber crackers on hand—and savor them slowly.

Meals in China don't add up to the meat-centered diet you might suppose from scanning the tempting menu at a local

Chinese restaurant. The traditional, lower-calorie diet features lots of vegetables, rice and soybeans, with meat as a garnish for flavoring.

Chinese Diet Tips

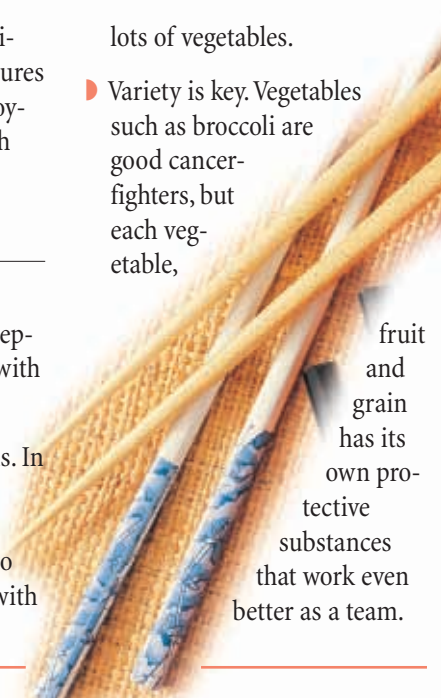
▶ Eating out or taking out Chinese-style? Skip the deep-fried selections and stick with steamed or stir-fried.

▶ Cut down on meat portions. In a traditional Chinese diet, one-quarter to one-half pound of meat feeds two to three people if it's paired with

lots of vegetables.

▶ Variety is key. Vegetables such as broccoli are good cancer-fighters, but each vegetable,

fruit and grain has its own protective substances that work even better as a team.



A Weighty Health Problem (continued from page 1)

more than 30, typically adds up to about 35 to 40 extra pounds for a man or 30 pounds for a woman of average height. (The average height for an American woman is about 5 feet 4 inches; the average American man is about 5 feet 9 inches tall, according to HHS.)

HHS' Healthy Lifestyles &

Disease Prevention initiative encourages families to take small, manageable steps within their current lifestyle to ensure effective, long-term weight control. An interactive web site, www.smallstep.gov, features 100 of these steps to control weight as well as weight-loss success stories.

The newest initiative is one of a series of wake-up calls about

the health dangers of being overweight. Along with increased deaths and reduced quality of life, the country's extra poundage costs big bucks. According to the 2001 *Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, the costs of health care and lost productivity related to overweight and obesity totaled about \$117 billion in 2000.

Pass Up the Daily White Bread

Studies in France¹ Italy² and Switzerland^{3,4} found that people eating diets high in refined grain products, such as white breads and other baked goods, pasta and white rice, have an increased risk of certain cancers, especially cancer of the colon or rectum. The Swiss and Italian research also linked such diets with increased risk of oral cancers and cancers of the larynx, esophagus, stomach and thyroid.

High amounts of whole-grain products, vegetables, fruits and, to some extent, garlic appeared to have a protective effect. This doesn't mean you shouldn't enjoy the occasional white roll, pasta with garlic bread or slice of cake or pastry. Just don't make a daily habit of it.

¹ *European Journal of Cancer Prevention*, July 1999

² *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, December 1999

³ *British Journal of Cancer*, March 1999

⁴ *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, June 2000.

Losing Weight (continued from page 1)

launched by the still-controversial diet first introduced in 1972 by Robert Atkins, M.D. His dietary approach defies conventional wisdom by promoting high levels of protein and fats and very low levels of carbohydrates. Atkins maintained, and studies have since helped confirm, that people can both lose weight and lower artery-clogging cholesterol on such a diet.

One study (*New England Journal of Medicine*, May 22, 2003), involved 63 obese men

and women randomly assigned to either a low-fat or low-carb diet. The low-carb dieters had a 4% greater weight loss after six months and also had more improvement in some risk factors for heart disease. However, in a year's time, there was no statistically significant difference in weight loss between the two groups.

Low-fat, high-carb diets have also been revisited. Now scientists and nutrition experts take care to emphasize "good carbs" over "bad carbs."

The bad ones are sugars and

starches, such as white bread and other products, such as cakes and cookies, made with refined flours. They're a quick-energy source because they break down quickly in the body. However, they increase blood-sugar levels in the body too rapidly and have been linked to an increased risk of both diabetes and heart disease.

Good carbs are complex, high-fiber carbohydrates like vegetables and whole grains. They take longer to break down, help maintain lower blood sugar levels and provide more

vitamins and minerals.

It's worth noting that low-carb diets, after vastly restricting most carbohydrates to jump-start weight loss in the first weeks, call for gradually increasing levels of these "good carbs." For that matter, modern low-fat, "high-carb" diets, which also promote heart health, call for these complex carbohydrates as a mainstay.

The difference between these two dietary approaches may be that one works better for some people and vice versa in terms of long-term weight loss.

(continued on page 4)

When Counting Calories, Age and Activity Count Too

People need different calorie levels at different stages of life. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (responsible for *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the Food Guide Pyramid), 2,200 calories is about right for most children, teenage girls, active women and many less active men. Teenage boys, many active men and some very active women may need as many as 2,800 calories a day.

In general, calorie needs decrease with age. Not only do activity levels drop but metabolism also changes over the years. Eating the same calorie level as

younger people is why so many people tend to gain weight in middle age. For some older adults, including many inactive women, 1,600 calories is about right to avoid gaining excess fat.

For example, average calorie needs for women ages 20 to 30 range from 2,000 to 1,900 for inactive women or up to 2,400 for active ones. From age 35 to 50, inactive women may need 1,800 to 1,700 calories while active ones need from 2,300 to 2,200 calories. From age 55 on, the calorie needs of active women drop from about 2,200 to 2,100 while those of inactive women fall from 1,700 to 1,500.

necessarily low-calorie. For instance, so-called "low-fat" foods often replace fat with a sugar, such as high-fructose corn syrup, which adds calories.

▶ Add exercise. An extra half hour of moderate physical activity on most days can lead to a 10% weight loss over time.

Losing Weight (continued from page 3)

Other Helpful Strategies

- ▶ Reduce portion sizes. With packaged foods, read the label. A box or bag often eaten as one serving may really contain two or more.
- ▶ Remember that low-fat processed foods aren't

Low-Fat Dairy Products Aid Weight Loss

For years, dieters turned to cottage cheese and yogurt as part of a weight-loss plan. A study at the University of Tennessee's Nutrition Institute (*Journal of Nutrition*, January 2003) explains why this may help people shed pounds.

The researchers found that a diet with ample levels of low-fat dairy products helps break down body fat. Among four groups of mice, those eating the most low-fat dairy products had the least body fat.

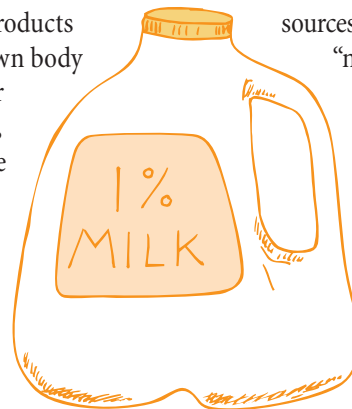
To see if this applied to humans, the researchers analyzed data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. After controlling for calorie intake, exercise and other factors, the analysis showed that people who ate more dairy products had significantly lower body fat.

The reason involves how the

body handles calcium, an important nutrient. If the daily diet is low in calcium, the body conserves it and creates higher levels of a hormone, calcitriol, that triggers production of fat cells. Higher levels of calcium in the diet suppress calcitriol and break down more fat.

The study found that dairy sources of calcium had "markedly greater effects [on] weight and fat gain and accelerating fat loss" than calcium supplements. Women who ate at least three servings a day of low-fat dairy foods had the least risk of obesity.

Previous studies have shown that dairy products not only help counter the risk of bone loss (osteoporosis) but also help reduce high blood pressure and may help prevent colon cancer by reducing the growth of polyps.



Free videos, on request:

- *Breast Health Alert: Know Your Breast Cancer Risk and How to Reduce It*
- *Taking Charge: Prostate Cancer Risk and What You Can Do About It*
- *Taking Charge: What You Need to Know About Prostate Cancer Treatment*

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▶ **The Gastrointestinal Tumor-Risk Assessment Program** is designed for people with an increased risk of gastrointestinal cancers due to family or past personal history of colorectal polyps or cancers of the colon, rectum, pancreas or other gastrointestinal organs. This program provides counseling, education, genetic testing when appropriate and personalized information about cancer prevention and risk reduction. **For more information, call 215-728-7041 or 1-888-FOX CHASE.**

▶ For women whose family history includes breast or ovarian cancer, the Margaret Dyson Family Risk Assessment Program at Fox Chase Cancer Center offers screening expertise, information, support and counseling about genetic testing. **Call 1-800-325-4145.**



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