

Up to 56% of adult Australians are overweight or obese. Being overweight not only brings health risks but it can make everyday activities harder to do. Where you have extra weight is very important - the health risks are greater if you carry extra weight around your middle. If your waist is larger than 100cm (men) or 90cm (women) then it's time to consider weight management. This can be achieved through some simple lifestyle changes and, in some cases, medicines.

There are health risks associated with being overweight or underweight.

Ways to assess weight include:

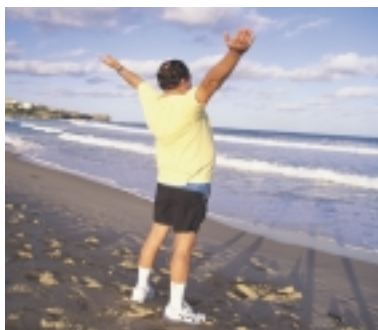
- body mass index (BMI) and waist-to-hip ratio - compare a person's height with their weight.
- 'ideal body weight' charts - often include a person's build in the assessment.

These give an idea of where you are in the healthy weight range. However, they don't consider your age or other health conditions. The best way to find out what is a healthy weight FOR YOU is to talk with your doctor. Your doctor can consider your weight along with other factors about your health and lifestyle.

This can increase your risk of:

- high blood pressure (see *High Blood Pressure* Fact Card)
- increased blood cholesterol (see *Fat & Cholesterol* Fact Card)
- heart disease
- some cancers
- stroke
- Type 2 diabetes (see *Diabetes* Fact Card)
- osteoarthritis (see *Arthritis* Fact Card).

It can also affect how well you can do daily activities. For example, you may find you tire more easily when you play with your children or walk the dog. The good news is that regular activity



combined with healthy eating can help bring your weight to a better level for you.

If you want to lose weight and achieve weight loss, set a reasonable goal e.g. 1-2 kilograms a month is ideal. Losing weight gradually also gives you time to learn how to keep the weight off. Weight loss and control can be achieved through:

Healthy eating is a matter of finding the right balance of food in your diet. To eat a healthy diet you need:

- plenty of plant foods (bread, cereal, pasta, noodles, vegetables, legumes and fruit)
- moderate amounts of animal foods (milk, yoghurt, cheese, meat, fish, poultry, eggs)
- small amounts of: fats — oils and margarines; cakes, desserts, and pastries; high-fat snack foods such as chips, pies, pasties, sausage rolls and other takeaways; lollies and chocolate.

For weight loss you must reduce the amount of fat you eat, in particular

saturated fat (see the *Fat & Cholesterol* Fact Card). Fat has twice as much energy as sugar or other food sources. Carbohydrate and fibre foods (see *Fibre & Bowel Health* Fact Card) are better for you and will fill you up more and for longer than high fat foods.

Other tips for healthy eating include:

- Limit alcohol to one or two drinks a day. Have at least one alcohol-free day a week.
- Eat regular meals each day; don't snack or nibble.
- Use a list when shopping and never shop when you are hungry.

Exercise increases energy, increases your 'good cholesterol' levels (see the *Fat & Cholesterol* Fact Card) and makes it easier for your body to burn stored fat.

- Be active at least 30 minutes each day. Walking, cycling, swimming, dancing - there are many options. **You get the same benefit if you exercise all at one time or in smaller amounts** e.g. 3 lots of 10 minutes. Note: if it's been a while since you've exercised, check with your doctor first to make sure the activity you choose will be safe for you.
- Use everyday events to increase your activity e.g. park your car or get off the bus 10 minutes walk from work and gain 20 minutes of exercise in your day.
- A morning walk, cycle or swim continues to burn off energy for up to 16 hours.
- Walking is one of the best ways of losing and maintaining your weight. It's convenient, low cost and relaxing.
- Set a regular time for physical activity, to help make it part of your daily routine.
- Read the *Exercise & the Heart* Fact Card.

Sometimes a point is reached where no more weight loss occurs. If more weight loss is needed, such a 'plateau' can be overcome with a change in your activity and eating. Talk to a dietitian or your doctor.

People often look to medicines as the solution to weight loss. Some medicines can help but in the long-term the best results will come in combination with realistic changes to your eating and activity.

Medicines available include:

Prescription medicines have been proven to be effective in weight loss. These include appetite suppressants and, more recently, lipase

Your **Self Care** pharmacist

inhibitors that work in the intestines to reduce the amount of fat your body absorbs.

There are many medicines available without prescription that claim to assist with weight control. Some say they absorb fat in your stomach, increase the rate at which your body burns fat, or simply help you lose weight 'naturally'. Recent studies into these medicines have found they do not help weight loss, and are nowhere near as effective as healthy eating and exercise.

Not all medicines are suitable for everyone. If you are considering a medicine to assist with weight loss, talk to your doctor and pharmacist first about the options that are most effective and appropriate for you.

*The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*  
Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, 1998. For a copy phone 1800 020 103 (ext 8654)

BORUSHEK, A.  
*Pocket Calorie and Fat Counter*  
Family Health Publications, 2000.

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|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • <i>Fat &amp; Cholesterol</i>    | • <i>Diabetes</i>                 |
| • <i>High Blood Pressure</i>      | • <i>Fibre &amp; Bowel Health</i> |
| • <i>Arthritis</i>                | • <i>Vitamins</i>                 |
| • <i>Exercise &amp; the Heart</i> |                                   |

**Your doctor** — listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book

**Dietitians Association of Australia** — listed under 'D' in the white pages of your capital city phone book.

**Nutrition Australia** —  
ACT (02) 6244 2211 NSW (02) 9552 3081  
QLD (07) 3876 2677 VIC (03) 9528 2453  
SA (08) 8332 4084 WA (08) 9235 6447  
NT (08) 8951 6731  
<http://www.nutritionaustralia.org>

**Tasmanian Community Nutrition Unit** — (03) 6222 7222

**Your Self Care pharmacist** — to find: (02) 6283 4777

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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