

Achieving a Healthy Weight in the New Year

On New Year's Eve, many of the estimated 100 million overweight Americans make a resolution to lose weight. But what can people do to set and reach attainable personal weight-loss goals?

Doctors recommend that patients adopt a healthy lifestyle instead of trying different fad diets several times each year. These are good first steps on the way to building a healthy new lifestyle.

It is important to consult with a physician before beginning any dietary or exercise program.

Dietary Weight Loss Recommendations

Here are some dietary recommendations for losing weight:

- The initial goal of weight loss therapy should be to reduce body weight by about 10 percent from baseline. With success, and if warranted, further weight loss can be attempted.
- Weight loss should be about one to two pounds per week for a period of six months, with the subsequent strategy based on the amount of weight lost.
- Low calorie diets (LCD) promote weight loss in overweight and obese persons.
- Reducing fat as part of an LCD is a practical way to reduce calories.
- Reducing dietary fat alone without reducing calories is not sufficient for weight loss. However, reducing dietary fat, along with reducing dietary carbohydrates, can help reduce calories.
- A diet that is individually planned to help create a deficit of 500 to 1,000 kcal/day should be an integral part of any program aimed at achieving a weight loss of one to two pounds per week.

Physical Activity and Weight Loss

Physical activity is a big part of most successful weight loss programs. Here are some exercise ideas to incorporate into a healthy lifestyle change:

- Physical activity should be part of a comprehensive weight loss therapy and weight control program because it:
 - Modestly contributes to weight loss in overweight and obese adults
 - May decrease abdominal fat
 - Increases cardio-respiratory fitness
 - May help with maintenance of weight loss.
- Initially, moderate levels of physical activity for 30 to 45 minutes, three to five days a week, should be encouraged. All adults should set a long-term goal to accumulate at least 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, and preferably all, days of the week.

- The combination of a reduced calorie diet and increased physical activity is recommended since it produces weight loss that may also result in decreases in abdominal fat and increases in cardio-respiratory fitness.
- After successful weight loss, the likelihood of weight loss maintenance is enhanced by a program consisting of dietary therapy, physical activity and behavior therapy which should be continued indefinitely.

A Guide to Physical Activity

Most weight loss occurs because of decreased caloric intake. Sustained physical activity, however, is most helpful in the prevention of weight regain. In addition, exercise has a benefit of reducing risks of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, beyond that produced by weight reduction alone.

Start exercising slowly, and gradually increase the intensity. Trying too hard at first can lead to injury.

Here are some examples of moderate amounts of physical activity.

Household Chores and Activities

- Washing and waxing a car (45-60 min.)
- Washing windows or floors (45-60 min.)
- Gardening (30-45 min.)
- Wheeling self in wheelchair (30-40 min.)
- Pushing a stroller (1.5 miles in 30 min.)
- Raking leaves (30 min.)
- Shoveling snow (15 min.)
- Walking stairs (15 min.)

Sporting Activities

- Playing volleyball (45-60 min.)
- Playing touch football (45 min.)
- Walking two miles (30 min.; 15 min/mile)
- Basketball (shooting baskets for 30 min.)
- Bicycling five miles (30 min.)
- Dancing fast (social) (30 min.)
- Water aerobics (30 min.)
- Swimming laps (20 min.)
- Basketball (playing game) (15-20 min.)
- Jumping rope (15 min.)
- Running 1.5 miles (15 min.; 10 min/mile)

All adults should set a long-term goal to accumulate at least 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, and preferably all, days of the week. This regimen can be adapted to other forms of physical activity, but walking is particularly attractive because of its safety and accessibility. Start out by walking 30 minutes for three days a week and can build to 45 minutes of more intense walking, at least five days a week. With this regimen, it is possible to burn 100 to 200 calories more per day.

Also, try to increase "everyday" activity such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator. With time, it is possible to engage in more strenuous activities. Competitive sports, such as tennis and volleyball, can provide an enjoyable form of exercise for many, but care must be taken to avoid injury.

Resources

- Weight-control Information Network, a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases of the National Institutes of Health: www.niddk.nih.gov
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health: www.nlm.nih.gov
- United States Food and Drug Administration: www.fda.gov
- United States Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion: www.nutrition.gov
- American Heart Association: www.americanheart.org

The recommendations and tips on this page are from the "Aim for a Healthy Weight" website created by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, one of the National Institutes of Health and part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt.

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