

# “I’m concerned about the extra weight I have gained. How do I adopt a healthier lifestyle?”

**Although it can be daunting, overcoming obesity is treatable with diligence, accountability and hard work.**

## What is obesity?

Now classified as a disease, the simplest definition of obesity is too much body fat; specifically, 20 percent or more above your ideal weight.

The causes of most cases of obesity are eating more calories than you burn and a lack of physical activity. There are reasons that these factors have increased over the years:

- People are consuming unhealthy, high caloric foods at a much higher rate than past generations.
- Lifestyles have become more sedentary; we are spending more time in cars, watching TV and in front of a computer.
- Along with sedentary lifestyles, people are not engaging in enough structured physical activity.

However, for a small population of people, obesity may be due to mental or physical illness, or genetics.

## Health concerns with obesity

There are several health issues that are associated with being overweight or obese:

- Elevated cholesterol and triglyceride (fat in your blood) levels
- Lower HDL levels—your “good” cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Impaired mobility, which can lead to falls, especially at an older age
- Increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, stroke, osteoarthritis and certain cancers

These risks are greater if your excess fat tissue is around your waist area.

## Overcoming obesity

The concept of losing weight is simple: eat less and move more. However, putting that concept into practice is the challenging part, because losing weight is also about behavior and lifestyle changes. Stopping old habits is hard, so if you are used to eating unhealthy foods and living a sedentary lifestyle, take it one step at a time when you’re setting your goals. Changing several habits at once, setting huge goals, or too many goals, can be overwhelming.

The key is to set S.M.A.R.T. goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely. Be sure to record them so you can check in and evaluate how you're doing. Here are some examples:

<b>General goal:</b>	I will lose weight.
<b>S.M.A.R.T. goal:</b>	I will lose one or two pounds a week. I will also record the amount of calories I eat each day, so I know I'm meeting my recommended daily caloric intake.
<b>General goal:</b>	I will exercise more.
<b>S.M.A.R.T. goal:</b>	I will exercise for 30 minutes a day, six days a week. If I don't have time for 30 minutes, I'll break it up into ten-minute segments.
<b>General goal:</b>	I will eat more vegetables.
<b>S.M.A.R.T. goal:</b>	I will eat at least three servings of vegetables, five days each week. I'll do this by including a serving of vegetables with every meal.

If you're overweight or obese, losing weight almost always leads to better health, but you should remember to check with your doctor before starting a weight loss program. Your doctor will let you know if any of your medications or conditions will be affected by a sudden lifestyle change and weight loss.

If you aren't sure of how to start an exercise routine, you may want to talk to a personal trainer. He or she can design a program specifically for you, and should be able to work around any injuries and limitations.

## Weight loss maintenance

For people who lose weight, a common problem is the tendency to drift back to old habits, which usually leads to putting the weight back on. In order to prevent this, understand that these diet and lifestyle changes are not temporary. If you want to keep the weight off, you will have to adopt these habits as part of your lifelong routine.

Another factor of weight loss maintenance is making new goals. After you have met your original goals, reevaluate and brainstorm new ones. Keep in mind, you aren't "replacing" your original goals, you're just continuing to challenge yourself with additional ones. As always, record them so you can hold yourself accountable and keep track of your progress!

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For more information about obesity, visit [fallonhealth.org](http://fallonhealth.org), click on Healthwise® Knowledgebase under Quick links, and search "obesity".

*\*Program eligibility and benefits may vary by employer, plan and product.*

