Weight Reduction - How to Lose Weight

A Summary

The best way to lose weight, and keep the weight off, is to be committed to a change in lifestyle. This includes eating a healthy diet and doing some physical activity on most days for about 60 minutes. Ten tips are given below.

- The main portions of your meals should be made up from starch-based foods (such as bread, cereals, potatoes, rice, and pasta), and fruit and vegetables.

- Cut out as much fat as you can from your diet. Fat contains twice as many calories as starchy or protein foods of the same weight. Tips include: use low fat spreads on bread; measure out oil when cooking; grill food instead of frying it; cut off excess fat from meat; choose leaner cuts of meat in smaller portions. Watch out for hidden fat in cakes, biscuits, pastry, chocolates, crisps, chips, pies, and pasties. Eat low fat versions of milk, cheese, yoghurt, etc, which have the same calcium content as 'full-fat' versions, but less calories.

- Low fat foods are generally best. But remember, some low-fat foods and drinks are high in calories such as alcohol, sugary drinks, and sweets. Have water as your main drink.

- It is best to eat three healthy meals each day, including breakfast. Eat each meal slowly. Don't skip meals. Skipping meals will just make you feel more hungry, make you think more about food, and you are more likely to overeat in the evening. Do not snack between meals.

- Do as much physical activity as you can. If you are not used to it, try starting with an extra 30 minute brisk walk every day, and build up from there. Any increase in walking, dancing, swimming, cycling, etc, is good. Try and build up the amount of activity you do each week until you are doing 60-90 minutes on at least five days a week.

- Consider keeping a diary to monitor the amount that you eat, and the amount of physical activity you do. This may help you become aware of your changing behaviour patterns.

- Plan what you are going to eat each day, rather than look in the cupboard or fridge to see what is there. Don't shop for food when you are hungry. Shopping after a meal is best.

- Be realistic. You do not need to aim for a 'perfect' weight. If you are overweight or obese, you are likely to get most health benefits from losing 5-10% of your weight (often 5-10 kg).

- It is best not to lose weight too fast. If you lose more than a kilogram per week, you may lose muscle tissue rather than fat. It is best to lose an average of ½-1 kg per week (about 1-2 lb per week). To do this you need to eat 500-1000 calories per day less than you did before. You will lose 6-12 kg if you keep this up for three months. Don't be disheartened by minor increases or levelling off in weight for a few days. Look for the overall trend over months.

- Tell others about your plans to lose weight. Support from family and friends can help you to stay motivated. Consider joining a local slimming club or similar support group.

Keeping to a reduced weight is often more of a challenge than losing some weight. Once you have lost some weight, you are more likely to keep your weight down if you eat a healthy diet, do some physical activity regularly, and weigh yourself once a week to keep a check on your weight.

See your practice nurse for further help and advice. There are also more detailed leaflets in this series called 'How to Lose Weight', 'Healthy Eating', and 'Obesity and Overweight'.

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