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## Patient information: Weight loss treatments (Beyond the Basics)

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### INTRODUCTION

Obesity is a major international public health problem and Americans are among the heaviest people in the world. The percentage of obese people in the United States has risen steadily [\[1,2\]](#).

Many people find that although they initially lose weight by dieting, they quickly regain the weight after the diet ends. Because it is so hard to keep weight off over time, it is important to have as much information and support as possible before starting a diet. You are most likely to be successful in losing weight and keeping it off when you believe that your body weight can be controlled.

This article discusses how to get started with a weight loss plan, including changes in your behavior, what you eat, and weight loss medications. Weight loss surgery is discussed in a separate article. (See "[Patient information: Weight loss surgery \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)".)

More detailed information about weight loss is available by subscription. (See "[Overview of therapy for obesity in adults](#)".)

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### STARTING A WEIGHT LOSS PROGRAM

Some people like to talk to their health care professional to get help choosing the best plan, monitoring progress, and getting advice and support along the way.

To know what treatment (or combination of treatments) will work best, determine your body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference (measurement). The BMI is calculated from your height and weight ([calculator 1](#) and [calculator 2](#)).

- A person with a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight
- A person with a BMI of 30 or greater is considered to be obese

A waist circumference greater than 35 inches (88 cm) in women and 40 inches (102 cm) in men increases the risk of obesity-related complications, such as heart disease and diabetes. People who are obese and who have a larger waist size may need more aggressive weight loss treatment than others. Talk to your health care professional for advice.

**Types of treatment** — Based on your measurements and your medical history, your doctor or nurse can determine what combination of weight loss treatments would work best for you. Treatments may include changes in lifestyle, exercise, dieting and, in some cases, weight loss medicines or weight loss surgery. Weight loss surgery, also called bariatric surgery, is reserved for people with severe obesity who have not

responded to other weight loss treatments. (See "[Patient information: Weight loss surgery \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)".)

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## SETTING A WEIGHT LOSS GOAL

It is important to set a realistic weight loss goal. Your first goal should be to avoid gaining more weight and staying at your current weight (or within 5 percent or five pounds). Many people have a "dream" weight that is difficult or impossible to achieve.

People at high risk of developing diabetes who are able to lose 5 percent of their body weight and maintain this weight will reduce their risk of developing diabetes by about 50 percent and reduce their blood pressure. This is a success.

Losing more than 15 percent of your body weight and staying at this weight is an extremely good result, even if you never reach your "dream" or "ideal" weight.

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## LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Programs that help you to change your lifestyle are usually run by psychologists, nutritionists, or other professionals. The goals of lifestyle changes are to help you change your eating habits, become more active, and be more aware of how much you eat and exercise, helping you to make healthier choices.

This type of treatment can be broken down into three steps:

- The triggers that make you want to eat
- Eating
- What happens after you eat

**Triggers to eat** — Determining what triggers you to eat involves figuring out what foods you eat and where and when you eat. To figure out what triggers you to eat, keep a record for a few days of everything you eat, the places where you eat, how often you eat, and the emotions you were feeling when you ate.

For some people, the trigger is related to a certain time of day or night. For others, the trigger is related to a certain place, like sitting at a desk working.

**Eating** — You can change your eating habits by breaking the chain of events between the trigger for eating and eating itself. There are many ways to do this. For instance, you can:

- Limit where you eat to a few places (eg, dining room)
- Restrict the number of utensils (eg, only a fork) used for eating
- Drink a sip of water between each bite
- Chew your food a certain number of times
- Get up and stop eating every few minutes

The types of foods we eat on a regular basis are related to whether we gain or lose weight over time. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and yogurt are associated with lower weight over four years, as contrasted with weight gain seen when eating french fried potatoes or chips, sugar-sweetened beverages, and red or processed meats [3].

**What happens after you eat** — Rewarding yourself for good eating behaviors can help you to develop better habits. This is not a reward for weight loss; instead, it is a reward for changing unhealthy behaviors toward healthy ones.

