

# What Is My Ideal Weight?

By Barbara A. Brehm, Ed.D.

Many years ago, nutrition and exercise specialists used the term "ideal weight" to indicate a body weight that would represent both good health and an attractive physique. Researchers derived formulas to calculate ideal weight based on height, frame size and body composition. It was thought that people should exercise more and limit their caloric intake to achieve "ideal weight," and that having a specific goal weight to strive for would be scientific, helpful and motivational.

Scientists who study weight control have since learned that "ideal weight" is not such a helpful term after all, and that weight loss does not usually follow neat and tidy equations. Experts now believe that instead of asking, "What is my ideal weight?" we should ask, "What is a healthful and achievable weight for me?" And some researchers believe we should drop the question altogether, and focus on developing a healthful lifestyle that includes good food and plenty of physical activity.

## What is a healthful weight?

A healthful body weight is a weight you can maintain with some vigilance, but without severely limiting your food intake. While choosing foods carefully is a requirement for good health, obsessing about every bite is not. A weight that will not allow you to eat a balanced diet can't be a healthful weight.

A healthful weight may not make you as skinny as fashion models, but this degree of leanness is not realistic for most people. Your weight will reflect your genetic body type. Look at your parents and other close family members. What do their bodies look like? Yours is probably similar.

Has your doctor said that weight loss would improve your health? People who have pre-diabetes or diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and other health problems are often encouraged to lose weight. If this is the case for you, remember that even a relatively small weight loss of 5 to 10 percent of your weight can improve these health markers.

## Weight maintenance is your goal

For good health and long-term weight control, maintaining your new weight is the ultimate goal. Almost anyone can lose weight with just about any diet. But most people regain the weight within a few months or a few years. Crazy diets, and losing and regaining weight is hard on your body. Ironically, you can end up fatter than before you started to diet!

If you need to lose weight, a better strategy is to lose a relatively small amount, maybe that 5 to 10 percent of your weight, by increasing activity levels and eliminating some extra calories from your diet. Eat well, get rid of most of the junk and consume smaller portions. Extra weight will come off slowly, perhaps only 1 pound a week, but weight lost slowly is more likely to stay off. Develop a healthful lifestyle that supports your new, healthful weight. Keep that weight off, and celebrate your success!

## What is a healthful lifestyle?

Researchers have found that most people who embark on a weight-loss program have unrealistically low goal weights. Many hope to lose 25 percent or more of their body weight. They

are disappointed when their bodies resist that degree of weight loss. The resulting disappointment and frustration often lead dieters to overeat in an effort to console themselves. A focus on achieving an unachievable weight can even lead to eating disorders, such as anorexia, bulimia and binge-eating disorder.

Instead of focusing on a low goal weight, focus on developing a healthful lifestyle that includes reasonable portions of delicious, nutritious food and regular physical activity. Successful losers generally engage in some form of physical activity, such as brisk walking, for at least one hour a day. While that may sound like a lot of time, your health should be a priority.

Regular physical activity not only helps you maintain a healthful body weight, it also helps to prevent chronic illness such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Regular physical activity helps you feel great -- less irritable, more energetic and less stressed. Of course, if you are not currently active, you should talk to your doctor if you have any health concerns, and increase your physical activity slowly and gradually.FM

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