a healthy weight for life
Are you at risk?

Most of us know if we've put on weight — our clothes feel tighter for a start. But, if this weight gain makes us technically 'overweight', we have more to be concerned about than just our physical appearance.

There are real health risks associated with being overweight. You may already know that having excess body fat increases the risk of diabetes, heart disease and stroke. But did you know that being overweight can also increase your risk of developing cancer?

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK) is a UK charity dedicated solely to the prevention of cancer through healthy diets and lifestyles. At WCRF UK, we are particularly concerned about the rapidly increasing number of people who are now overweight and obese in the UK.

Thousands of weight-related cases of cancer, in fact, thousands of early deaths, could be prevented in the UK each year. After smoking, obesity is now regarded as the single largest avoidable cause of cancer in the UK. With this in mind, the purpose of our booklet is to educate people about how to lose weight, or not gain excess weight in the first place.

What are the benefits?

Achieving a healthy body weight will bring about an array of health benefits, and also psychological ones! First of all, you will feel better because you will have much more energy. It is also likely that, with each step towards your target weight, you will notice that you feel much more positive about the way you look. This, in turn, will help you to feel more confident about yourself. More importantly, it will also improve your day-to-day health and help deal with a wide range of problems including high blood pressure, breathlessness and difficulty sleeping. But the long-term benefits are even more significant — you will reduce your risk of many serious illnesses, including heart disease, stroke, type II diabetes and several forms of cancer.
What is a healthy weight?

One of the first places to begin is to find out if you are at a healthy weight or not. The bathroom scales only tell one part of the story. Here are some other, more accurate ways to assess which category you fall into.

One way to find out if you’re at a healthy weight is to check your BMI (Body Mass Index)*. Do this by converting your height into metres (m) and your weight into kilograms (kg). Then divide your weight by your height squared.

*BMI may not be an accurate indicator for some groups of people, including bodybuilders, athletes, the elderly, children or those less than five feet tall.

As an example, take a woman who is 5 feet (1.52 m) tall and weighs 11 stone (69.9 kg).

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\frac{\text{Weight: 69.9}}{\text{Height: (1.52 \times 1.52)}} = \text{BMI of 30}
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>BMI Range</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>underweight</td>
<td>Less than 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>healthy weight</td>
<td>20-24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overweight</td>
<td>25-29.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>very overweight or obese</td>
<td>30 or more</td>
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A second method of assessing whether you are overweight is to measure your waist circumference. Place a tape measure around your waist immediately above your hipbone. Measure straight after exhaling. For women, a waist measurement of 35 inches (88 cm) or more indicates that they are overweight. For men, the significant figure is 40 inches (102 cm) or more.

From these methods, if you discover that you are overweight, now is the time to do something about it. As a rule of thumb, it would be realistic to aim to lose around 10% of your body weight if your BMI is 30 or more and 5% if your BMI is between 25 and 29.9.

Don’t worry if you have tried unsuccessfully to lose weight in the past. Instead, follow our sensible advice and you will gradually lose the excess weight. Better still, this time you’re more likely to keep it off for good. That’s because the advice from WCRF UK is not based upon a quick fix diet. Instead, it is a way of eating and living that you should be able to maintain for life.
No more dieting

Unfortunately, many of us tend to be in a hurry to lose excess weight – often for an event such as a wedding or holiday. But, by turning to quick fixes or fad diets, we are unlikely to achieve long-term weight loss.

Contrary to popular belief, you don’t need to eliminate entire food groups or give up your favourite foods to lose weight. The key is to stick to a healthy eating pattern most of the time, allowing yourself small treats now and again. Combine this with daily physical activity and you are guaranteed to shift excess pounds.

If you are someone who diets frequently, try to change the way you think about your weight, and about dieting. Instead of trying to achieve an ‘ideal’ body shape by dieting, why not turn your attention to eating and living healthily?

Research shows that ‘diets’ simply do not work in the long run. A better approach is to make small adjustments to the food you choose and the amount of activity you do. Over time, these new, healthier habits will simply become a way of life.

Why should I avoid fad diets?

Constant dieting, or ‘yo-yo’ dieting, leaves us at risk of becoming malnourished. Following a very low calorie diet, or one that eliminates whole food groups, often means we are depriving our bodies of vital nutrients. Although we may lose weight to begin with, the chances are that we will eventually gain the weight originally lost – and sometimes more. Following such strict eating patterns often makes us feel unsatisfied, which can lead to picking in between meals, or bingeing on high fat, high sugar foods. Also, dieting can cause havoc with our metabolism. Our body gets used to having less food and then the weight piles back on when we return to our former eating patterns. This traps us in an unhealthy pattern of ‘yo-yo’ dieting.
Enjoy healthy foods

There is no quick route to a healthy weight. The important thing is to be patient – the excess pounds won’t fall off overnight. Instead, you will notice a gradual weight loss over a few months. Losing weight this way greatly increases your chances of keeping it off in the long run.

Many people dislike the idea of trying to lose weight because they are afraid they will be constantly hungry. But, at WCRF UK, we believe that eating plenty of healthy foods – like vegetables and fruits – will help you to feel full for longer. With a healthy, sensible approach to weight loss, you won’t feel that you’re depriving yourself.

Less processed foods such as vegetables, fruits and wholemeal bread are bulky so they are digested slowly. The opposite is true of calorie-heavy, fatty or sugary foods. These do not keep you feeling full for as long.

In order to lose weight, the advice from WCRF UK is to reduce your overall intake of high fat, high calorie foods. These should be replaced with wholesome, less processed foods that will help to sustain you – both physically and psychologically – on the path to permanent weight loss.

A taste adventure!

By concentrating on healthy foods, rather than trying fad diets, you won’t feel that you are ‘missing out’. In fact, the opposite is true. You will be including a range of foods that are full of flavour and colour. Now is the time to start enjoying the food you eat. You will begin to savour wholesome, delicious, fresh foods which are full of flavour. Turn to the back of this booklet for proof that low fat, low calorie recipes can be tasty! You should also begin to cook using a selection of herbs and spices to enhance the flavour of your meals, without adding any unnecessary fat or salt.

Healthy fast food!

Vegetables and fruits are an ideal snack food – in fact, they are the perfect fast food. Think of your favourite type of fruit – even if it’s not already ready to eat – all you need to do is wash it, then peel or chop it! Vegetables and fruits also tend to be low in calories – they contain approximately 35 calories per 100 grams. Compare this to around 536 calories per 100 grams for crisps and you’ll realise the massive difference!
Mother nature’s answer

From today on, instead of ‘dieting’, we advise you to turn your attention to healthy foods that grow in the earth. Think of ‘plant foods’ such as vegetables, fruits, wholegrains (e.g. brown rice and wholemeal bread), pulses (e.g. kidney beans and lentils) and nuts and seeds (e.g. pumpkin seeds and Brazil nuts).

These foods are full of natural goodness and most are low in calories. Try to include more plant foods in every meal from now on – for instance, have fresh fruit and cereal for breakfast, a chicken salad with lots of colourful vegetables for lunch, and perhaps a vegetable stir-fry with brown rice for dinner.

As well as being high in fibre, plant foods are also rich in vitamins, minerals and other compounds that may help to protect against diseases including cancer. So these foods will not only benefit your waistline, but also your general health!

The WCRF UK eating guide

As a general rule of thumb, our advice is to assign two-thirds or more of each meal – whether it’s breakfast, lunch or dinner – to plant foods. The remaining one-third or less can be made up of ‘animal foods’ – any foods that come from an animal. This includes poultry, fish, lean meat, eggs or reduced fat dairy products (such as cheese or yoghurt). And, when you want a snack, try to opt for plant-based ones wherever possible – for example, a small handful of peanuts or an apple.

Maintain?

If you eat more plant foods, you should find it relatively easy to maintain your current weight. As long as you avoid unhealthy snacks and eat three, well balanced, plant-based meals each day, weight gain should no longer be a problem.

Lose?

If you need to lose weight, eat mainly plant foods. Also, reduce the portions that you eat (see page 6 for help). Avoid snacks between meals if possible – or if you need a nibble, reach for some fresh fruit or chopped vegetables.
Before you make any changes to your choice of food, it helps to take a close look at your current eating habits. Do most of your meals follow the two-thirds (plant foods), one-third (animal foods) rule? If not, this could be where you’ve been going wrong!

Taking this approach to eating does not actually mean that you need to eat significantly less food in order to lose weight. Instead, you will be shifting the emphasis to healthier, higher quality wholefoods.

Many bulky, ‘fibre rich’, plant foods tend to have a low glycaemic index (GI) which means they break down slowly and release glucose into the blood stream gradually. This means we stay fuller for longer, and that we are less likely to crave sugary, high fat foods so we end up eating more satisfying meals – all for fewer calories.

How can I eat more plant foods?

◆ Keep washed and trimmed celery, carrots, broccoli and peppers in the fridge. You’ll be much more likely to snack on them if they are ready to eat.

◆ Try to have a colourful salad with lunch and dinner. Use fresh lemon juice or balsamic vinegar with finely chopped herbs for a low fat dressing.

◆ Add beans or lentils to salads, stews, soups or pasta/rice dishes. Try different kinds, such as yellow lentils, chick peas, cannellini, kidney, pinto or black beans.

◆ Once or twice a week, try a new type of plant food. It could be an exotic fruit, a new type of grain (try our cous cous recipe on page 15) or an unusual vegetable.

◆ Make salads and soups into satisfying main dishes by adding some reduced fat cheese, beans or a handful of nuts or seeds sprinkled on top.

◆ Make a huge bowl of fruit salad for a nice start to the day. Keep it in the fridge, ready for you and your family for breakfast – or even just a snack – on the following day. Top with yoghurt for an added twist (see page 13 for our exotic fruit salad recipe).