A guide to losing weight for men and women

So you want to lose weight... for good

British Heart Foundation
The British Heart Foundation takes your health and your weight very seriously. We don’t guarantee quick fixes or magical cures for weight loss. In fact we’re dubious about anyone who does. We prefer a sensible and permanent approach to losing weight. All the research findings suggest that losing it steadily and gradually is the safest way and the weight is much more likely to stay off than if you lose it quickly.

We’re not keen on the word ‘diet’ either. It sounds restrictive and very short term. We believe in a weight loss plan for life. That doesn’t mean having to survive for ever on salads and crispbreads! Our plan includes plenty of tasty and filling options which you can prepare easily and enjoy at home or elsewhere.
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The British Heart Foundation and weight

If you're interested in losing weight for health benefits, we've produced this booklet for you. Whether you're male or female, in your twenties or in your sixties, whether you have any signs of heart disease or not, the advice which follows is written for you. In fact the whole family could benefit from our tips on healthy eating for life.

And your health isn't the only thing which stands to improve. Getting in shape can mean getting fitter and feeling more energetic. Many people notice a boost to their confidence too as they can wear different clothes, play more with children or grandchildren and generally get more out of life.
"The best thing about the front of the booklet is the BHF logo. You immediately know it's going to be sensible."

(35-44 yr old overweight woman)

Heart disease and weight

If you're very overweight you're more likely to have a heart attack, especially if your extra weight is around your middle. The good news is that by losing weight you can cut your risk of heart disease considerably.

Research studies also suggest that many overweight people with angina, raised blood cholesterol and high blood pressure found that their conditions improved greatly, even after losing only some of their excess weight. Many of those who kept the weight off were able to reduce their medication or even stop it altogether.

What is heart disease?
The most common form of heart disease among adults is called **coronary heart disease**. It occurs when the coronary arteries bringing oxygen-rich blood to your heart muscle get 'furled up' by fatty deposits (atheroma).

**Angina** occurs when your heart does not receive enough blood and oxygen. An attack can be brought on by physical activity or emotional stress.

A **heart attack** occurs if a coronary artery becomes completely blocked, which can happen, for example, when a blood clot forms on an atheroma that already narrows the artery.

**High blood pressure** (the medical name is 'hypertension') increases your risk of heart disease, strokes and kidney disease. The cause of most high blood pressure is not clear but the following can all contribute: being overweight; excessive salt intake; drinking too much alcohol; physical inactivity.

**High blood cholesterol** increases your risk of coronary heart disease. The most common cause of high blood cholesterol is too much fat in the diet. Occasionally people have high levels due to an inherited condition.

Coronary heart disease is usually the result of several risk factors. These include:

- high blood cholesterol
- smoking
- high blood pressure
- physical inactivity
- being overweight
- family history
- diabetes
“When I became a teacher, my lifestyle changed but my diet didn’t. I’ve been sitting around much more, getting no time for exercise, and eating as much as ever, especially late at night. Since then I’ve been putting on about a stone a year.”

(25-34 year old overweight man)

Weight gain

You may be one of those people who has always been big and battled with your weight on and off for years. Or, you may have been steadily gaining weight over the years as many people gain weight with age. Many people are less active as they get older because of family commitments, long working hours and other pressures. Leisure time is often spent in front of the television or computer which doesn’t help. Whichever is true you’re not alone. Over half of all adults in the UK are now overweight and this is true for men and women. Remember that just preventing any further weight gain is a very valuable and worthwhile goal in itself.
Motivated to lose weight?

Protecting yourself from heart disease is one very good reason to think about losing weight. Getting and keeping to a healthy weight also reduces your risk of other health problems like diabetes, some cancers and arthritis, too.

Most of us know if we’re overweight by looking in a mirror or by the size or tightness of our clothes. You may like to check your weight on the chart below, which also takes account of your height. If your weight is within the overweight or obese section (fat or very fat), you are wise to be thinking about trying to lose some. The ‘healthy weight’ section (OK) is your long term goal but in the short term you may wish to set yourself a more realistic target of perhaps losing 5 or 10lbs. Don’t be too ambitious in your goal otherwise you are almost certain to be disappointed with the results. Remember that maintaining your current weight (ie not gaining more) is an achievement in itself.

Your shape, as much as your weight, could be affecting your health risk. The more apple-shaped you are, rather than pear-shaped, the more at risk of heart disease you are. You can assess this simply by measuring your waist (or girth) at the narrowest part. If your girth is more than 32 ins (80 cm) for a woman or more than 37 ins (94 cm) for a man, your health is at risk. If the measurement is more than 35 ins (88 cm) for a woman or 40 ins (102 cm) for a man, your risk is much higher.

Other reasons for trying to lose weight may be as important to you as health: you might want to get fitter, get in shape, look better, feel better or just be able to get into clothes which no longer fit.

Whatever your reasons, you’ve made an important step by getting hold of this booklet. Read on to find out more about losing weight - for good.