

**YOUR  
WEIGHT,  
YOUR  
HEALTH**

How to take  
control of your  
weight



# Contents

- 3 Is this booklet for me?**
- 4 What's weight got to do with health?**
- 6 Why have I gained weight?
- 8 How to lose weight**
- 9 Eating well to lose weight
- 12 How to change the way you eat
- 16 Being active
- 21 Make a habit of it
- 25 How can I keep it off?
- 26 We all need support**
- 28 Healthy children**
- 30 Healthy eating for children
- 32 Active children
- 34 Body Mass Index**
- 36 Further help**



Almost two-thirds of adults in the UK are now overweight.

One in three children has an unhealthy weight too.

# Is this booklet for me?

**If you want to be healthier, have more energy and feel better**

YES

**If you are ready to lose weight now, or at least you want to stop gaining more weight**

YES

**If you have already lost some weight – well done – and you want to keep it off**

YES

You might be worried about your own weight. You might be worried about someone in your family – your partner or your child. Whether you think it's a big problem or something you're just a little concerned about, this booklet is for you.

If you are overweight, it can affect your health and how you feel about yourself. Being overweight can even lead to some of the most serious health problems. Losing just a small amount of weight can help you feel good and improve your health.

## **This booklet is about how to:**

- **work out if you are carrying too much weight;**
- **lose weight and keep your weight under control;**
- **live an active life;**
- **fit activity and healthy eating into your busy life; and**
- **find more help, advice and support.**

# What's weight got to do with health?

There are lots of reasons why being overweight matters. Realising that your weight could affect your health is an important step towards making successful changes in your life.

Being overweight can put your health at risk. At worst, it can lead to life-threatening conditions – but it can cause discomfort, pain and unhappiness in many other ways, too.

LIFE-THREATENING	LEADS TO LIFE-THREATENING DISEASES	PAIN AND UNHAPPINESS	DISRUPTIVE AND IRRITATING
heart disease some cancers such as breast, colon, stomach	high blood pressure high blood cholesterol diabetes	pain and arthritis in the knees and hips back pain fertility problems polycystic ovary syndrome hernia gallstones disturbed sleep anxiety and depression poor self-image and low self-esteem	snoring breathing difficulties permanent tiredness sweatiness and chafed skin difficulty climbing stairs difficulty fitting in seats social stigma and isolation

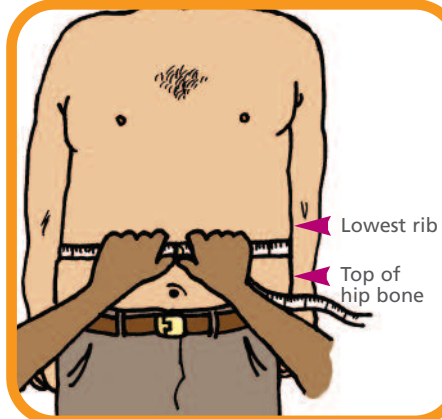
## What is a healthy weight?

If you are an adult, doctors use something called Body Mass Index (BMI) to decide whether your weight could be affecting your health. To work out your BMI, you need to measure your height as well as your weight. There is a chart in the back of this booklet to help you work out your BMI.

### Measure your waist

Measuring your waist with a tape measure can also tell you whether you are carrying too much weight.

Take care to measure your waist in the right place. Measure it at the halfway point between your lowest rib and the top of your hip bone.



	Healthy waist	Risk to health
Women	Up to 35" (88cm)	35" (88cm) or more
Men	Up to 40" (102cm)	40" (102cm) or more

Most people who succeed in losing weight say that they:

- **feel better;**
- **have better health; and**
- **have much more energy.**

They also enjoy things like wearing their favourite clothes, being able to sit comfortably in cosy restaurants and going through turnstiles without feeling embarrassed.

## How would losing weight make a difference?

For adults, losing just a little weight – even half a stone or a stone – can bring important health benefits. If you lost 5 to 10% of your weight, it could reduce your blood pressure, risk of diabetes and blood cholesterol levels.

This chart gives you an idea of what 5% or 10% weight loss would mean in actual weight. Remember, it is best to lose weight gradually at a rate of about 1–2lb ( $\frac{1}{2}$ –1kg) a week, so it could take at least three to six months.

Starting weight	5% means losing	10% means losing
11 stone (70kg)	8lb (3.5kg)	1 stone 2lb (7kg)
14 stone (89kg)	10lb (4.5kg)	1 stone 6lb (9kg)
16 stone (102kg)	11lb (5kg)	1 stone 8lb (10kg)
18 stone (115kg)	13lb (6kg)	1 stone 11lb (11.5kg)
20 stone (127kg)	1 stone (6.5kg)	2 stone (13kg)

## Why have I gained weight?

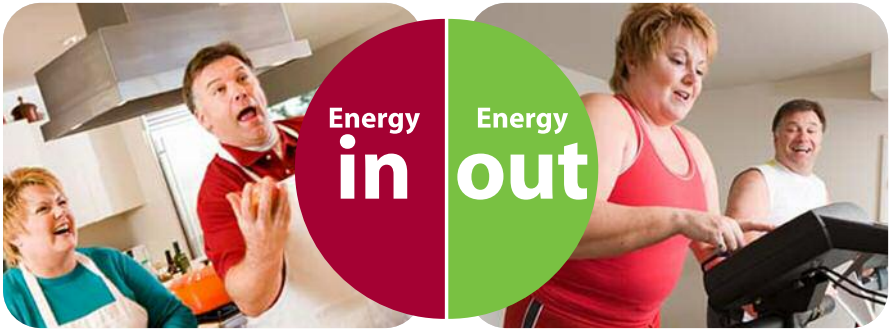
There are lots of reasons why you could gain weight. Here are just a few:

- **the pressures of a busy life;**
- **the kind of food you eat and how much; or**
- **too little physical activity.**

Sometimes, we also eat for emotional reasons or snack as a quick fix – perhaps when we are stressed, bored or angry.

## Calories

Weight gain is all about how much energy you take in to your body and how much energy your body uses. On food labels, you will see energy written as kcal, which means calories.



Your weight stays **the same** if you take in roughly the same amount of energy (calories) through food and drink as your body burns up through day-to-day living and physical activity.

Your weight will **go up** if you regularly take in more energy (calories) from food and drink than your body burns up.

Your weight will **go down** if you regularly take in less energy (calories) from food and drink than your body burns up.

## Lifestyle

There can be many reasons why we take in more energy than we burn off:

- **High-calorie foods that are high in fat and sugar are widely available and are getting cheaper.**
- **We cook less from raw ingredients and we eat out of the home much more than we used to.**
- **We eat more snacks and fast food rather than regular meals.**
- **We drink more canned or bottled sugary drinks.**
- **Portion sizes are getting bigger.**

We are also much less active than ever before. It's easy to sit down for quite a lot of the day and move very little! Televisions, computers, cars and all the modern gadgets we use mean that most things in everyday life are less effort. And that means we use fewer calories. You may have changed job or retired and become less active as a result.

# How to lose weight

**For many people, losing weight can be one of the greatest challenges they face. Some fail because they try to change everything in their life at once. But the best way to succeed is to start by making two or three realistic changes that you can stick to – then, over time, you’ll begin to see results.**

To lose weight, you need to take less energy into your body from food and drink than the amount of energy your body uses up by being more active. This may sound simple but actually doing it – day in, day out, over weeks or months – needs planning and determination.

But don’t worry, you can do it if you take simple steps, and believe that you can do it.



## Different strokes for different folks

There is more than one way to lose weight – different things work for different people. You may be able to get some advice at a health centre or leisure centre, or you may decide to try a slimming group. Some people prefer to do it on their own or with a friend.

*If you need advice about what’s available in your area, ask at your local GP surgery.*



## Getting started

This booklet is not about miracle diets; it is about looking at your life and building up gradually to the changes that will make a difference. It will help you find two or three things you can do differently every day – and stick to them. Once you're comfortable with those changes, you'll have the confidence to make other changes.

**There are four ingredients for a weight-loss programme that works:**

- **eating right;**
- **changing behaviour (habits);**
- **being active;**
- **getting support.**

## Eating well to lose weight

You don't have to change everything you eat to lose weight. These pages will give you ideas about how to begin making realistic changes to the way you eat and tips for introducing a healthy diet.

To lose weight you need to take less energy (calories) into your body from food and drink than the amount of energy your body uses up by being active.

Healthy eating is the foundation of a diet for losing weight for most people, and this is the sort of eating you can enjoy for life. But if you keep an eye on the overall amount of some foods that you eat, you won't have to cut out all the luxuries or treats. The good news is: if you can begin with two or three things to cut out or reduce, you'll be able to go on enjoying plentiful amounts of others.

The ingredients of eating to lose weight are:

- **healthy eating;**
- **leaving out the obvious extras; and**
- **controlling the overall amount of some foods.**

## Healthy eating means:

- At least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, try to include them in every meal;
- starchy foods like potato, rice or wholemeal bread (with no added oil or butter or high fat creamy sauces);
- choosing lower fat meat, poultry and dairy foods;
- having 2 portions of fish, of which one is oily;
- reducing your salt intake to no more than 6g a day;
- cutting back on foods high in fat and sugar;
- cutting out fizzy, sugary drinks; and
- drinking less alcohol.



## Calorie control

Healthy eating is more important than counting calories. The *Balance of Good Health* plate shows the types and proportions of foods which make up a healthy diet. For most people this means more fruit and vegetables and more starchy foods. But

being aware of how many calories you need and how to control the calories you eat will help you find realistic changes that you can stick to.

An average man needs about 2,500 calories a day and an average woman about 2,000 calories to stay the same weight.

Eating 500 to 600 fewer calories each day than your body needs is a realistic way to lose weight. That means around 1,500 calories a day for adult women and 2,000 calories a day for adult men.

The *Balance of Good Health* is reproduced with kind permission of the Food Standards Agency.

## Fat – a lot or a little?

Here is a simple way to check whether the amount of fat and saturated fat in a product is 'a lot' or 'a little'. The amount of fat is closely linked to calories, so the lower the better.

### THIS IS A LOT OF FAT:

20g fat or more per 100g  
5g saturates or more  
per 100g

### THIS IS A LITTLE FAT:

3g fat or less per 100g  
1g saturates or less  
per 100g

Try to choose more foods that contain only a little fat (3g fat or less per 100g) and cut down on foods that contain a lot of fat (20g fat or more per 100g).

That way you eat enough to be properly nourished and you won't feel too hungry. It gives you a steady and safe weight loss of about 1–2lb ( $\frac{1}{2}$ –1kg) a week.

To be sure you're eating the right amount of foods to lower your calorie intake, you'll need to keep a check on portion sizes. It is easy to be tempted by bigger portions especially when they're sold at bargain prices and everyone's idea of a portion is different. You can find out more about portion sizes on the Department of Health's website [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk).

Check food labels for calories and fat, they show the amounts per 100g and per portion – choose carefully. For more help with understanding food labels, visit the Food Standards Agency's website [www.eatwell.gov.uk/foodlabels](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/foodlabels).

## How to change the way you eat

Here are some examples of daily food and drink intake that show how small changes can help you reduce your intake by around 500 calories. These are ideas to provide examples of changes you can make, but we don't recommend you spend your time calorie counting.

Reducing calorie intake from 2,000 to 1,500.

INSTEAD OF...		HAVE...		CALORIES SAVED
<b>BREAKFAST</b> Orange juice (6oz/150ml)	55kcal	Orange juice (6oz/150ml)	55kcal	0kcal
Large bowl (60g) of crunchy muesli cereal with semi-skimmed milk	260kcal	Medium bowl (1.2oz/30g) of porridge, or a wholegrain breakfast cereal which is not sugar-coated, with semi-skimmed milk	160kcal	30kcal
		1 banana	70kcal	
<b>MORNING SNACK</b> 1 digestive biscuit	70kcal	1 apple	40kcal	30kcal
<b>LUNCH</b> Small baked potato (4oz/100g) with butter and grated cheddar cheese	450kcal	Medium baked potato (6oz/150g) with baked beans (no butter)	330kcal	120kcal
Square of flapjack (2½oz/60g)	300kcal	Small fruit scone (2oz/50g) without butter	160kcal	140kcal
<b>AFTERNOON SNACK</b> Chocolate-covered biscuit bar (1oz/25g)	125kcal	Grapes, about 12 (3oz/80g)	50kcal	75kcal
<b>EVENING MEAL</b> Ready meal, eg chicken curry with a cream-based korma sauce OR leek and bacon pasta bake (no extra salad or vegetables)	550kcal	Eg chicken curry with a tomato-based sauce OR vegetables and bean pasta bake	350kcal	90kcal
		Mixed salad of lettuce, grated carrot, onion, cucumber, tomato	50kcal	
		Low-calorie/diet fruit yoghurt (5oz/125g pot)	60kcal	
2 glasses of wine (125ml x 2)	160kcal	1 glass of wine (125ml)	80kcal	80kcal
Milk in hot drinks throughout day (200ml/½ pint semi-skimmed)	90kcal	Milk in hot drinks throughout day (200ml/½ pint semi-skimmed)	90kcal	0kcal
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,060kcal</b>		<b>1,495kcal</b>	<b>565kcal</b>

Reducing calorie intake from 2,500 to 2,000.

INSTEAD OF...		HAVE...		CALORIES SAVED
<b>BREAKFAST</b> 2 slices of toast with butter	260kcal	2 slices of toast with reduced fat spread	235kcal	25kcal
<b>MORNING SNACK</b> 2 biscuits	130kcal	1 apple	40kcal	90kcal
<b>LUNCH</b> Cheese sandwich and a medium sausage roll (2oz/60g)  Bag of crisps (1oz/30g)	810kcal	1½ ham and tomato sandwiches  Bag of lower fat crisps (1oz/30g)  1 banana	775kcal	35kcal
<b>AFTERNOON SNACK</b> Can of fizzy orange drink (330ml)	130kcal	Carton of orange juice (200ml)	70kcal	60kcal
<b>EVENING MEAL</b> Medium serving of lasagne (12oz/300g)	570kcal	Large serving of chilli con carne (12oz/300g)	360kcal	225kcal
Medium serving of oven chips (6½ oz/165g)	320kcal	4½ heaped tablespoons of boiled rice (7oz/180g) and peas	305kcal	
1 pint of beer	180kcal	½ pint of beer	90kcal	90kcal
Milk in hot drinks throughout day (200ml/ ⅓ pint semi-skimmed)	90kcal	Milk in hot drinks throughout day (200ml/ ⅓ pint semi-skimmed)	90kcal	0kcal
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,490kcal</b>		<b>1,965kcal</b>	<b>525kcal</b>

All calorie values shown in the tables are approximate.

## Regular meals

Eating well to lose weight is not only about what you eat, but how and when you eat too. Although it's not always easy, eating regular meals seems to be a key to success. If you grab a bite to eat on the run, you might think you're eating less but it tends to mean going for fast foods or snacks, which are often higher in fat and calories.

When you eat a proper meal or snack, sitting down at a table, you're more likely to be eating healthily – lots of vegetables and salad-based meals. Eating your main meal with lots of vegetables or salads fills you up with fewer calories.

## A word about breakfast

Breakfast really is the best way to start your day. It kick-starts your metabolism for the day ahead and helps you to get through to lunch. So don't be tempted to skip breakfast as a way of saving calories. Even if you don't feel hungry in the morning, try to make yourself have something to eat. Could you face fruit, yoghurt, cereal or toast?

### Make mine a 'full English'

Can't bear the idea of giving up cooked breakfasts or a lunchtime pint? Good news – you don't have to. Instead, ask yourself a few questions. What else are you eating in the day? Perhaps you can cut out other food instead. How often do you like your special treat? If it's every day, why not make it twice a week? Do you have all the trimmings? Cut down the number of items on your plate; have grilled tomatoes or mushrooms instead of sausage and black pudding.



## Small steps – where to start

To get started, many people find that it helps to keep a diary of what they eat and drink for a few days. That way, you can see where you might be able to begin making changes. If you want to try this, get a small notebook and jot down all the food and drink you take for three days before you start. Include one weekend day if you can.



Some people worry it will be more expensive to eat healthily – but if you shop carefully it doesn't have to be. Cutting back on some things like take-away meals and snacks will leave you with more to spend on healthy treats. Try different types of fruit and vegetables, breads and fish.

Careful planning will help you shop wisely.

## Being active

Being active burns calories – so it can help you lose weight. It is also very important if you have lost weight and want to keep it off.

### The benefits of being active

- Better health.
- Helps tone the body, so you look slimmer.
- Less stress and more confidence.
- You'll be able to keep up with friends and family.
- Need not cost anything.
- Can easily become part of your daily routine.
- A social and fun way to catch up with friends.

People who are more active tend to have more energy, are less stressed, sleep better and generally feel better.

### How much and how often?

Find ways of increasing your activity which are realistic for you. This doesn't have to mean going to the gym or taking up sport – many people find it suits them better to go for a regular walk or join a dance class.

Everyday activity – like walking – may be the simplest way for you to get moving more.

As an adult, you should aim to be active on five or more days of the week.

- **Thirty minutes of activity will have general health benefits and improve your fitness.**
- **Increase activity to at least 60 minutes to help you lose weight and stop the weight going back on.**



## No fitness freak?

Don't worry, everyone can do something to increase their activity levels, as long as they find what is right and enjoyable for them. It doesn't have to cost money and you don't need to wear special clothes!

Be realistic and make as much time in your day as you can to be more active. You can do it as several short bursts of 10 minutes

## How hard?

To really help, the activity you do should be of moderate intensity, which means:

- **your breathing and heartbeat will be a little faster than usual – to the level where you can feel your pulse – but you should still be able to hold a conversation; and**
- **you will feel warm, and on hot or humid days, you will sweat.**

This sort of activity tones you up, improves your immune system and makes you feel good.

### HERE IS AN IDEA OF THE INTENSITY OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTIVITY:

#### ACTIVITY

#### INTENSITY

Ironing, cleaning, dusting	Light
Walking at a stroll (2mph)	Light
Hoovering, painting, decorating	Moderate
Walking (3–4mph)	Moderate
Golf, badminton, tennis (doubles)	Moderate
Mowing the lawn	Moderate
Cycling (10–12mph)	Moderate
Aerobic dancing	Vigorous
Cycling (12–14mph)	Vigorous
Swimming (crawl)	Vigorous
Tennis (singles)	Vigorous
Running (6–8mph)	Vigorous

## A way of life

Try to make physical activity a way of life – for good. Make it a regular and enjoyable part of your day.

- **Build in a walk, for example walking to the bus or train instead of using your car, or getting off the bus one stop earlier.**
- **Park your car at the far end of the car park as a regular habit.**
- **Use the stairs instead of a lift or escalators.**

Do activities with your friends and family – it's great fun. And if you do activities with your children, it sets them up for a lifetime of being on the move, too.



**Be safe**  
If you're worried  
whether it's  
safe for you  
to exercise,  
talk to your  
doctor

## Ready to get moving?

Think about when you can be more active and try doing a combination of different things. Here are some activities that people have found work for them:

- walking or cycling – to work, to school or college, to a friend's house, during lunchtime;
- gardening;
- DIY;
- shopping;
- cleaning the house;
- taking the stairs instead of the lift and walking up escalators;
- swimming or water-based exercise classes;
- cycling;
- dancing – ballroom, line dancing, disco, salsa dancing;
- going to the gym;
- exercise or aerobic classes; and
- walking or rambling in the park or in the countryside.

Your local leisure centre will provide lots of options for different activities. There will be groups for different ages and interests; they may run separate groups for men, women and children. Lots of leisure centres even offer a discount for regular users.

## Write it down

A physical activity diary can be a record of the activity you've done each day. It could help you plan ahead and set aside times in the day or week when you want to try and be more active. Make time for some activity each day. You can make a note of opening times, and special sessions, at the swimming pool or planned events, like an organised walk.

## Step it up

A pedometer is a gadget that fits to your belt and counts the number of steps you take. Many people have found a pedometer keeps them motivated to walk more each day and helps them to set goals.

In some areas, pedometers are available for loan from GPs (ask your GP or practice nurse if they are participating in the National Step-O-Meter Programme). Otherwise, you can buy a simple, inexpensive one from your local chemist or supermarket.

See how many steps you normally do in a day. For most people, this will be about 3,000 or 4,000. Aim to increase it by, say, 1,000. Gradually build it up so that you are doing more and more steps each week.

Adults can work towards a goal of 10,000 steps a day.

# Make a habit of it

Eating for weight loss and becoming more active mean making some real changes to the way you live your life. Changing what you do – the habits you have – is never easy. To change successfully, you will need time to think about and plan what it will involve.

## 1. Keep track

A diary will really help you keep track of how you eat and the activities that you do. That way you can look for the simple changes you are going to make in your life, which will be the breakthrough for you.

If you write down what you were doing on each day and any particular thoughts and feelings you had at that time, it can help you identify times when you eat more or do less activity. Be honest with yourself – that way you can look for simple changes which will really make a difference.

## 2. Set goals

Remember that every small change you make will be a step towards taking control of your weight. The starting point for you might be to make changes to your snacks – fruit instead of biscuits, for example.

Your diary will help you keep track of what you've achieved. Having it written down could also help you to stay motivated.

## 3. Be positive

Remind yourself that you are doing your very best to make changes. Success is when you've stuck to the changes at the end of each week.

Some people start to blame themselves if they have a bad day or if they don't lose weight as quickly as they'd hoped. Don't let negative thoughts steer you off course. If you have a few bad days, don't worry. Pick yourself up and keep going.

#### 4. Reward yourself

We all need appreciation for our hard work. The effort you make towards a healthier lifestyle is no exception. Plan some rewards for yourself, but avoid things involving food! Choose something that really is a treat for you like a magazine, a trip to the cinema or maybe a new CD or a manicure.

#### Eating for comfort?

A lot of people who struggle with their weight say that food comforts them. They eat for emotional reasons, rather than because they are hungry – comfort food is usually high in calories.

If you eat for comfort, take some time to think about what sets this off and plan what you can do when those situations arise. If you're feeling down or you think you've eaten too much, try to stick to your activity goals. Activity relieves stress and anxiety by releasing 'feel-good' hormones. You'll feel pleased with yourself when you manage to take control in these situations, and not use food as your comfort.

**Under pressure?  
If you eat for comfort when you're busy, have some fruit snacks handy**

## Snack attack

If you think high-calorie snacks could be a problem for you, try making changes to these before you change anything else that you eat. That simple step could be enough to help you start losing weight!

## My 'small steps' goals

Write here the first steps you are going to take in making changes to what you eat and how you can get more active. Why not start with three, and when you're comfortable with those add two more?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

## The lifestyle checklist

This list covers things people found helped them change their lifestyle – for good. Tick the ones you think might help you.

1. Ask for encouragement and help from the people close to you, like your partner, friends and children.
2. Only eat at planned times and stick to similar times each day.
3. Plan meals ahead for yourself and the whole family.
4. Check if you're really hungry before you eat. It may be thirst or a craving.
5. Sit down at the table to eat and do nothing else while eating.
6. Set aside regular times for activities or classes. Make it a habit by planning to attend come rain or shine.
7. Plan to be more active with a friend or relative and make it a social occasion (eg gardening together, walking to work with a colleague).
8. Chew slowly and take your time over food.
9. Plan to say no to second helpings or cook only the amount of food you will eat.
10. Don't shop for food when you're hungry. Keep to your shopping list.
11. Put healthy snacks like fruit, chopped vegetables and yoghurt at the front of the fridge where they're readily available.
12. Write a list of activities you can do instead of being tempted to eat (eg cleaning out a cupboard, going for a walk, sorting out your papers, going swimming).



## How can I keep it off?

If you have succeeded in losing weight, well done! The next challenge is to continue the good work and keep the weight off. To do this, you will need to stick to good eating and everyday activity habits.

- 1. Keep eating healthily** every day, but don't worry about enjoying a special meal out from time to time.
- 2. Keep active** – it is one of the most important things you can do if you want to keep your weight off. Ask family and friends to join you in walking, swimming or your regular exercise sessions.
- 3. Keep track of your weight** by weighing yourself once a week. If it starts to creep up, even by just a few pounds, check what you are eating, and do more activity to help you get back on track.



### Tried and tested

Many people who successfully lose weight, and keep it off, say that the same things worked for them.

#### They:

- plan meals and include healthy, low-fat foods;
- eat lots of vegetables and fruit;
- are active regularly (at least 60 minutes 5 days a week);
- always eat breakfast; and
- watch their alcohol intake.

# We all need support

To maintain a healthy weight, you need to make lasting changes to your lifestyle – and getting support will help keep you motivated. Your doctor or nurse may be able to advise you about the options available.

Sometimes the best support is close to home, like a relative or partner, or a 'buddy' at work. Spell out to them exactly how you need their help.

**For example:**

- **not eating high-calorie snacks when you're around or tempting you by bringing take-aways or chocolate into the house;**
- **offering to stay with the children so you can do an exercise class or swimming session;**
- **helping you pick yourself up when things go a bit wrong; or**
- **joining you in your regular walking.**

Many people like the social support they get from joining a local slimming group or club. Knowing you are not alone in your attempt to lose weight can be a comfort and an inspiration. There are probably many different groups and clubs on your doorstep – self-help groups, evening classes and sports or leisure clubs.

## Help from your doctor

Your GP may offer a step-wise approach but it depends on how overweight you are and how much it is affecting your health.

1. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist may be able to give you professional help with your eating and activity plans. Or, they may recommend someone else like a health adviser or lifestyle coach, or refer you to a registered exercise specialist or local schemes like rambling groups.
2. Your doctor may refer you to a registered dietitian at your local health centre. The dietitian will have special skills in nutrition, motivation and weight management.
3. In some cases, your doctor may think that medication would help you lose weight. Your doctor will advise whether this is appropriate for you. However, you will have to be able to show your doctor that you have already tried to make some lifestyle changes. Changes to your diet and activity are necessary for the medication to be successful in the long term.
4. In exceptional cases, and if you have tried all other approaches, surgery may be an option for you.

All the services described here vary depending on where you live and many are available only to adults, not children or young people.

# Healthy children

It's easy to miss the fact that your child could be overweight. But children are getting heavier these days and that's bad news for their health – now and in the years to come.

Doing something about it now can prevent many years of worry – for you and for them – as they get older.

## Does it matter?

Children who are overweight are more likely to get diabetes or heart disease in later life. But health is not the only issue; they could also be affected by:

- teasing or bullying;
- low self-esteem;
- embarrassment when playing games and sports; or
- difficulty in being active (eg getting breathless quickly).

## What can I do?

As a parent, sometimes you can tell if your child is overweight by the fit of their clothes. If their clothes are right for their height but too tight around the waist, they could be overweight.

Keep an eye on your child's weight, even from the baby stage. Spotting that your child is overweight before they start school is important because it can help you prevent them becoming obese in childhood and later life.



If you want to talk to someone about your child's weight, make an appointment right away with your doctor, health visitor or school nurse. They will be able to check your child's growth and their Body Mass Index (BMI) for you. All they need is their age, height and weight. There are special BMI charts for children because BMI charts for adults are not applicable for children.

If your child is a toddler, at nursery or at primary school, the sooner you make changes to their lifestyle, the better. This will help guide your child on a lifelong path of eating well and being active.

If you're pregnant, you may want to think now about how you plan to feed your baby. Breastfeeding is recommended for all babies – for all-round good health and for a healthy weight. Breast milk is free of charge and convenient! Also, breastfeeding burns calories, so it helps mums get back into shape.

# Healthy eating for children

The best thing you can do to help your child develop healthy eating habits and be more active is to show them how it's done! Children who see their parents, grandparents and carers following a healthy lifestyle tend to learn by example. These habits become normal and ingrained.

Most overweight children do not need to diet. They may not even need to lose weight. It's almost like a waiting game. As they grow taller, aim to keep their weight about the same. That means they grow into their ideal weight as they get taller.

The balance of foods listed below applies to children over the age of five years. It is not a good idea to count calories for children. Eating regular sit-down meals, limiting high-calorie snacks and trying to avoid 'food on the run' will help get your child into good habits for life. Resist the temptation to give your child sweets and chocolate for rewards or comfort.

## Every day, all children should aim to eat:

- five or more servings of a variety of fruit and vegetables (fruit with breakfast and for snacks, and some vegetables, salad or fruit at every mealtime);
- meals which are based on starchy foods, eg potatoes, pasta, rice, bread, breakfast cereal or other cereal;
- lower fat dairy foods – milk, yoghurt, fromage frais or cheese – the lower fat varieties are best once children are over five years; and
- protein rich foods – poultry, fish, eggs, beans, pulses, lentils.

## Fatty foods

Small amounts of low fat spread on bread or toast, and oil for cooking, in sauces or salad dressings, help children enjoy healthy, tasty meals.

## Snacks and sugary drinks

Savoury and sweet snacks (like crisps, biscuits and chocolate) and sugary drinks give calories but little nourishment.

## Healthy eating habits

To help children towards healthier eating habits, try and do any of these as much as you can:

- **Switch the television off when you're eating.**
- **Sit together as a family to eat your meal if you can.**
- **Eat healthy foods yourself and be positive about them.**
- **Try new foods and don't be put off if the children don't like them straight away.**
- **Encourage and praise 'good eating' instead of nagging.**
- **Involve the children in food preparation.**
- **Restrict screen time (computer and TV) to two hours a day.**

For older children and young adults, further information is available at [www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/teens/](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/teens/)



# Active children

Help your child find activities that they enjoy. For most children, playing in the playground or park or running around outside is a real joy – whatever the weather. All children should aim to be active for at least one hour every day.

A variety of activity is important to help them develop strong bones, muscle strength and flexibility. It can be natural and spontaneous (in the playground, playing outside), planned (walking to school) or proper school sports, where they have all the facilities and equipment. Remember to praise your children when they do well and do not criticise them if they are not as good as others.

**Look for local groups such as Rainbows, Beavers, Brownies or Cubs**





## On the move

Here are some ideas to help young children be more active:

<b>WITH PARENTS:</b>	Walking, cycling or scootering to school Kicking a football in the park Walking the dog Obstacle courses Walks with picnics in town parks Rounders Fruit picking Visits to city farms Nature trails French cricket Trips to the local playground Bike rides Playing Frisbee Running
<b>IN THE SCHOOL PLAYGROUND:</b>	Tig Hopscotch Huff and puff Hula hoop Hide and seek Skipping Football
<b>ON WET DAYS:</b>	Indoor soft play Dancing to music or with a dance mat
<b>AT THE LEISURE CENTRE:</b>	Swimming Gymnastics Trampolining Badminton Climbing walls
<b>AT LOCAL OUTDOOR COURTS:</b>	Basketball Netball Tennis Skateboarding

# Body Mass Index

If you are an adult, doctors use something called Body Mass Index (BMI) to decide whether your weight could be affecting your health.

## Am I putting on weight?

The size of your clothes can be a clue. Have you had to buy bigger clothes recently or are your clothes becoming uncomfortable? Has your waistband become tight?

### If you want to work out your BMI:

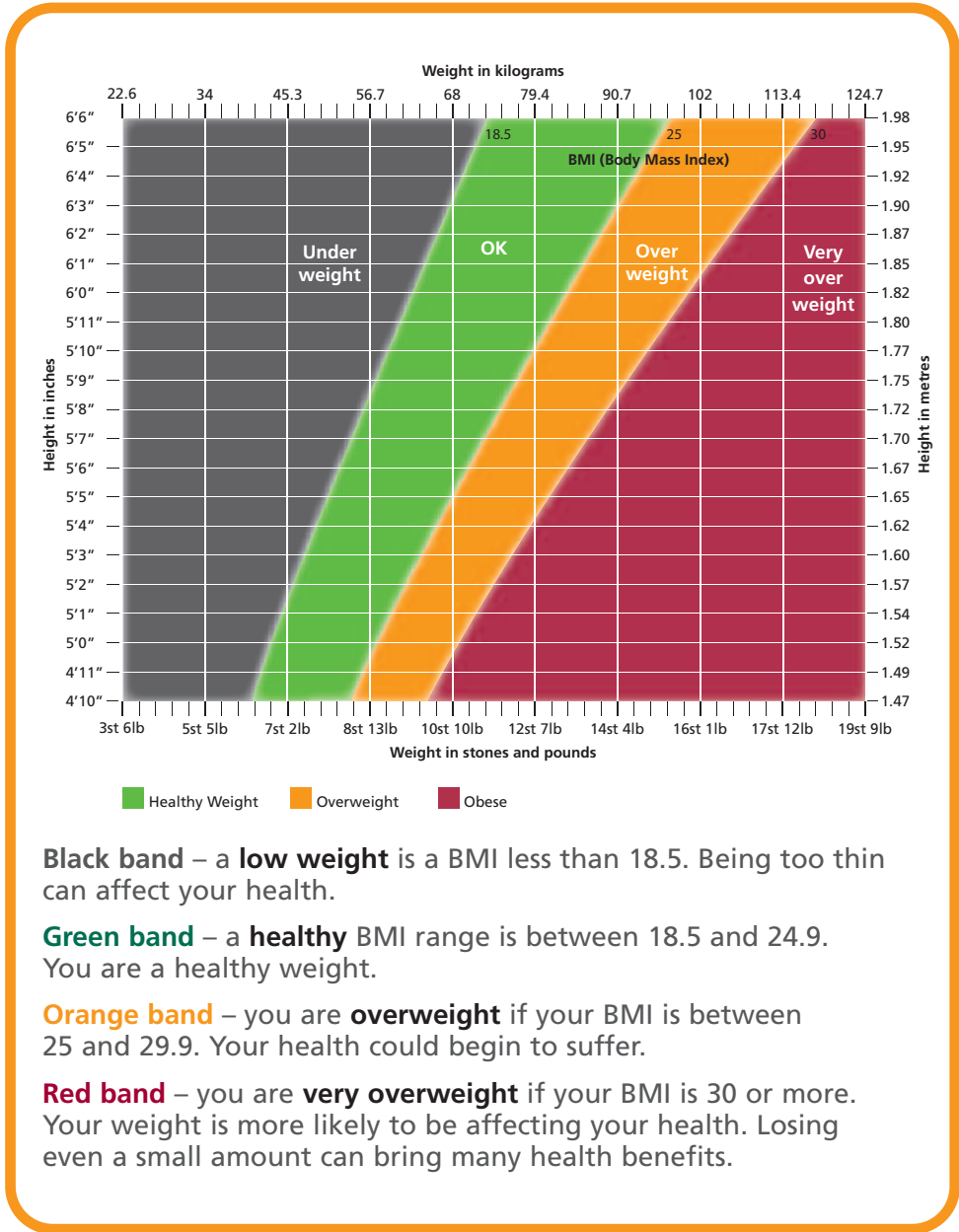
1. Find out your height in metres and multiply the number by itself. That gives you your height squared.
2. Find out your weight in kilograms and divide that number by your height squared.
3. The final number is your BMI:

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight (kg)}}{[\text{height (metres)}] \times [\text{height (metres)}]}$$

### If you don't want to do that:

1. Use the ready reckoner on the Food Standards Agency's website, [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)
2. Ask your nurse or doctor to do it for you.

# Your BMI will fall within one of the bands shown here



**Black band** – a **low weight** is a BMI less than 18.5. Being too thin can affect your health.

**Green band** – a **healthy** BMI range is between 18.5 and 24.9. You are a healthy weight.

**Orange band** – you are **overweight** if your BMI is between 25 and 29.9. Your health could begin to suffer.

**Red band** – you are **very overweight** if your BMI is 30 or more. Your weight is more likely to be affecting your health. Losing even a small amount can bring many health benefits.

The BMI chart is reproduced with kind permission of the Food Standards Agency.

# Further help

The internet is a great source of help and information. If you don't have access at home or work, your local library may be able to help.

For practical ideas about healthy eating, look on the Food Standards Agency's website at [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)

For accurate and balanced information about weight loss, look on the website created by registered dietitians at [www.bdaweightwise.com](http://www.bdaweightwise.com)

The British Heart Foundation's National Centre for Physical Activity and Health has lots of helpful publications and resources at [www.bhfactive.org.uk](http://www.bhfactive.org.uk)

Everyday Sport has lots of messages about how to be active and has interactive diaries and challenges to complete at [www.everydaysport.org](http://www.everydaysport.org)

The Active Places website will help find the nearest facilities for a wide range of activities at [www.activeplaces.org](http://www.activeplaces.org)

The Active Woods website identifies places where people can be active in their local area in the countryside at [www.forestry.gov.uk/activewoods](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/activewoods)

Sport England can help you find places to be active and has guides, studies and research at [www.sportengland.org](http://www.sportengland.org)

The Youth Sport Trust at [www.youthsporttrust.org](http://www.youthsporttrust.org) suggests sporting activities and programmes for toddlers and children of all ages.

Walking the way to health at [www.whi.org.uk](http://www.whi.org.uk)

TOAST is a charity that campaigns for a wider understanding of the issues relating to weight and obesity at [www.toast-uk.org.uk](http://www.toast-uk.org.uk)

A booklet for adults on safe and healthy weight loss. Includes how adults can help overweight children but is not intended for children.



© Crown copyright 2006  
274537 1p 1000k Apr06 (AHP)  
Produced by COI for the Department of Health  
First published April 2006

If you require further copies of this title quote 274537/*Your weight, your health – how to take control of your weight* and contact:

DH Publications Orderline  
PO Box 777, London SE1 6XH  
**Email: [dh@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dh@prolog.uk.com)**

Tel: 08701 555 455  
Fax: 01623 724 524  
Textphone: 08700 102 870 (8am to 6pm Monday to Friday)  
[www.dh.gov.uk/publications](http://www.dh.gov.uk/publications)