

For Your Health: Simple Tips for Keeping Weight in Check, Improving Health

by Dr. Graham A. Colditz
October 3 2022 4:42 PM

ALTON - Weight can be a tricky topic. While our weight has no bearing on who we are or how we should be viewed or treated, it can be quite important when it comes to health and well-being. And that can be very meaningful - not only to us personally but also to our family, friends and others who care about us.



Keeping weight in check can lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, arthritis, liver disease, gallstones and 13 different cancers. It can also give a boost to quality of life and even how long we live.

Numbers, though, show what most of us already know: that keeping weight in check isn't easy. Nearly 75 percent of adults in the United States are at an unhealthy weight, and just over 20 percent of children and adolescents 6 years old and up are obese.

One reason for this is that many of us live and work in environments that can make it harder to make choices that promote healthy weight. For example, there may be few places in our neighborhoods where we can easily walk or find affordable, healthy food, or our work schedules may make it difficult to fit in exercise or get enough sleep. Efforts to improve such situations are ongoing by health professionals, policy makers and community members, but change can take time.

There are, though, helpful steps many of us can take right now toward a healthier weight. Achievable goals can have real benefits, such as keeping weight steady over time, no matter our starting weight – or losing a few pounds if overweight. Try these tips, starting with small changes and building from there:

Move your body every day – and cut back on time spent sitting

This doesn't have to mean sweating on a treadmill, unless that's what you enjoy. The important thing is just to get some type of physical activity regularly. In general, the more, the better, and even small bits of activity can add up during the day. A good goal to slowly work to is to get around five hours a week of activity, like walking.

Eat healthy, mostly plant-based foods

Focus on fruit, vegetables and whole grains, and limit processed and fast foods, which can be high in calories, refined grains and added sugar.

Cut back on sugary drinks

Drinks like sugary soda, energy drinks and sports drinks are a big source of extra calories and have been linked to weight gain. Try to slowly cut back, ideally getting down to zero. No-calorie fizzy water and unsweetened tea and coffee are great alternatives.

Start the day with a healthy breakfast

A healthy breakfast can help you feel energized – and avoid hunger pangs – until lunchtime. Good choices can include fruit, whole-grain bread or cereal, low-fat yogurt or an egg or two.

Help your kids develop healthy weight habits

The benefits of being at a healthy weight start early in life – and grow into adulthood. Help your kids develop good habits by doing things like going on walks as a family, preparing healthy meals and snacks together and making good sleep a priority.

Work to improve the health of your community

We can each play a role in creating communities that help promote and support healthy weight and well-being. Attend a school board meeting to ask about adding healthier snacks to after school activities. Take part in a park or trail clean up, or ask your local government about adding more bike lanes to roads. Efforts like these, no matter the size, can help make a difference.

We don't have to look like fitness influencers or world-class athletes to be healthy, but some doable weight goals can have a real impact on our health and well-being. Working toward those goals may also help bring our family, friends and community along with us.

It's your health and your family's health. Take control. For more tips, see Siteman Cancer Center's [8 Ways to a Healthier Weight](#).

Dr. Graham A. Colditz, associate director of prevention and control at Siteman Cancer Center at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, is an internationally recognized leader in cancer prevention and the creator of the free prevention tool [YourDiseaseRisk.com](#). Alton Memorial Hospital is a member of the Siteman Cancer Network.