

Healthy Weight

Overweight and obesity – a sizeable issue

The number of Australians who are overweight or obese has reached an all time high. The past two decades has seen Australians' weight rise at an alarming rate of about one percent a year, with 67% of men and 52% of women now being overweight or obese. This concerning trend is also affecting children and adolescents in Australia with an estimated 1 in 4 to 5 children and adolescents being above a healthy weight.

Why is being overweight a problem?

Aside from an increased sense of vitality, maintaining a healthy weight has many health benefits. Being overweight can raise blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels, increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke. The risk of type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and osteoarthritis is also increased with excess body weight.

By starting early, prevention of excess weight gain in children and adults can reduce the risk of many of these health problems.

Weight – a balancing act

Body weight is a matter of balancing the energy (calories) from food that we put into our bodies with the amount of energy we burn during our daily activities. If we don't use up all the energy we consume then the excess will be stored as body fat. If the balance is tipped this way day after day, body weight will increase.

Research suggests that Australians are getting fatter as a result of too little physical activity and too many calories from food.

How healthy is your weight?

A simple way to work out if your weight falls into the healthy weight range for your height is to calculate your Body Mass Index (BMI). Simply divide your weight (in kilograms) by your height (in meters) squared:

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{Weight (kg)}}{\text{Height (m)} \times \text{Height (m)}}$$

The following BMI classifications are designed for adults aged 18 years and over:

BMI	Classification
Less than 18.5	Underweight
18.5 to 24.9	Healthy weight range
25 to 29.9	Overweight
30 and over	Obese

Note: BMI may be overestimated in people with very muscular builds

Specific BMI charts are available for children. Consult a health professional such as a General Practitioner or an Accredited Practising Dietitian for further information.

Where fat is carried on the body is also of importance. Body fat that is distributed around the abdomen (waist) poses a greater health risk than body fat around the hips and thighs.

What can we do about it?

While every month there is a new diet released full of promises, unfortunately there is no miracle cure for losing weight. Short-term weight loss may be achieved on a range of diets however, in the majority of cases once people go off a diet their weight will be re-gained. Research has shown that the most effective way to achieve sustainable weight loss is a balanced, calorie-controlled eating plan combined with regular physical activity. The aim should be to re-educate eating habits for the long term. Even a weight loss of just 5 to 10 percent can result in significant improvements in health.

Get your body moving

Regular physical activity can help achieve a healthy weight. A good aim is for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity such as walking on most days of the week. Talk to your doctor about what kind of physical activity plan is best for you.

Healthy eating for life

Balancing your food intake means enjoying a wide variety of nutritious foods to ensure all our



nutritional needs are met for overall health and well-being. It is recommended that we eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, legumes and cereal foods and include lean meat, fish, poultry, milk, yogurt, cheese and/or alternatives in our diets.

Tipping the balance in favour of weight loss requires increasing our physical activity and reducing the amount of calories we eat. To cut down on calories: keep portion sizes moderate, choose lean meats and reduced or low fat dairy foods, use low fat cooking methods and limit your intake of biscuits, cakes and fried take-away.

Good news for dairy

Dairy foods are often not the first foods that come to mind when thinking of losing weight however growing scientific evidence suggests that including dairy foods in a calorie-controlled diet may actually promote weight loss.

Calcium is well known for the vital role it plays in maintaining strong bones, but there is now emerging research that suggests dairy calcium may have particular benefits for weight management too. This new research shows that dairy calcium may alter the way that fat cells work. Experiments in animals and humans have demonstrated significantly greater weight and fat loss when dairy calcium is included as part of a calorie-controlled diet. Interestingly, it has been found that calcium from dairy foods has a substantially greater effect on weight loss when included in calorie-controlled diets than calcium from supplements.

Dairy calcium appears to influence weight by both reducing the amount of fat stored and increasing the amount of fat broken down.

In a recent clinical study, it was found that overweight adults on a calorie-controlled diet that included at least 3 serves of dairy foods a day lost 70 percent more body weight than those on a similar calorie-controlled diet with minimal dairy. This study also found that much of the weight loss was particularly due to the loss of unhealthy abdominal fat. Similarly in another study, overweight subjects consuming a calorie-controlled, high yogurt/calcium diet lost 81 percent more abdominal fat than the control group. Another benefit found for the group on the high

yogurt diet was the maintenance of more muscle than the control group.

It also appears that dairy calcium may affect body fat in children and adolescents. Studies have shown that children with higher intakes of dairy calcium have lower levels of body fat and are less likely to be obese.

Healthy weight with dairy

Dairy foods such as milk, yogurt and cheese are important sources of over ten essential nutrients including vitamins A and B12, calcium, carbohydrate, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, protein, riboflavin and zinc. For good health and to assist in weight management, 3 serves* of reduced or low fat† dairy foods are needed each day. One serve is equal to 1 glass (250mL) of milk, 1 tub of yogurt (200g) or 2 slices (40g) of cheese.

Unfortunately when many people embark on a weight loss program they incorrectly reduce or eliminate dairy from their diets in the mistaken belief that they are too 'fattening'. While all dairy foods can fit into a balanced diet, there is also a wide variety of reduced or low fat dairy foods which are ideal to include in a calorie-controlled diet. In addition, foods containing protein, such as dairy foods, have also been shown to be quite filling. And now with the great news about dairy foods and weight management, there is even more reason for you to enjoy 3 serves of dairy every day.

3 serves every day

Consuming 3 serves of dairy foods every day is easy. Start your day with a bowl of cereal and milk and top with fruit-flavoured yogurt. For lunch add 2 slices of cheese to a salad roll or top 2 slices of bread with tomato and grated cheese and melt under the grill. And for a tasty, low-fat snack, simply blend low fat milk and yogurt with fruits such as bananas or strawberries.

For further information on weight management consult a health professional such as a General Practitioner or an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

*3 serves of dairy provides approximately 100% of the average recommended dietary intake for calcium.
†Reduced or low fat dairy foods are not suitable for children under 2 years.

