

Health Risks of Being Overweight

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The Health Education Network



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Health Risks of Being Overweight

Weighing too much may increase your risk for developing many health problems. If you are overweight or obese, you may be at risk for:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease and stroke
- Cancer
- Sleep apnea
- Osteoarthritis
- Gallbladder disease
- Fatty liver disease

You can lower your health risks by losing as little as 10 to 20 pounds.

Type-2 Diabetes What is it?

Type-2 diabetes used to be called adult-onset diabetes or non-insulin dependent diabetes. It is the most common type of diabetes in the U.S. Type 2 diabetes is a disease in which blood sugar levels are above normal. High blood sugar is a major cause of early death, heart disease, kidney disease, stroke, and blindness.

How is it linked to being overweight?

More than 80 percent of people with type-2 diabetes are overweight. It is not known exactly why people who are overweight are more likely to suffer from this disease. It may be that being overweight causes cells to change, making them less effective at using sugar from the blood. This then puts stress on the cells that produce insulin (a hormone that carries sugar from the blood to cells) and makes them gradually fail.

What can weight loss do?

You can lower your risk for developing type-2 diabetes by losing weight and increasing the amount of physical activity you do. If you have type-2 diabetes, losing weight and becoming more physically active can help you control your blood sugar levels. Losing weight and exercising more may also allow you to reduce the amount of diabetes medication you take.

Heart Disease and Stroke What is it?

Heart disease means that the heart and circulation (blood flow) are not functioning normally. If you have heart disease, you may suffer from a heart attack, congestive heart failure, sudden cardiac death, angina (chest pain), or abnormal heart rhythm. During a stroke, blood and oxygen do not flow normally to the brain, possibly causing paralysis or death. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S., and stroke is the third leading cause.

How is it linked to being overweight?

People who are overweight are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, high levels of triglycerides (blood fats) and LDL cholesterol (a fat-like substance often called the "bad cholesterol"), and low levels of HDL cholesterol (the "good cholesterol"). These are all risk factors for heart disease and stroke. In addition, people with more body fat have higher blood levels of substances that cause inflammation. Inflammation in blood vessels and throughout the body may raise heart disease risk.

What can weight loss do?

Losing 5 to 15 percent of your weight can lower your chances for developing heart disease or having a stroke. If you weigh 200 pounds, this means losing as little as 10 pounds. Weight loss may improve your blood pressure, triglyceride, and cholesterol levels; improve how your heart works and your blood flows; and decrease inflammation throughout your body.

How can I lower my health risks?

If you are overweight, losing as little as 5 percent of your body weight lower your risk for several diseases, including heart disease and diabetes. If you weigh 200 pounds, this means losing 10 pounds. Slow and steady weight loss of 1/2 to 2 pounds per week, and not more than 3 pounds per week is the safest way to lose weight.

To lose weight and keep it off over time, try to make long-term changes in your eating and physical activity habits. Choose healthy foods, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and low-fat meat and dairy products, more often and eat just enough food to satisfy you. Try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity—like walking—on most days of the week, preferably every day. To lose weight, or to maintain weight loss, you may need to do more than 30 minutes of moderate physical activity daily.

See your doctor before starting any exercise program!

Source: The National Institute of Health