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## Best diet against obesity? No diet at all

It never fails. Several times a day, I will have a patient who asks me about the best ways to lose weight. In order to answer this question, one has to first define obesity, which occurs when one weighs 20 percent or more over her ideal weight. You can find the ideal weight for your height and sex from a weight chart.

Obesity increases risk of major illnesses, such as stroke, heart attack, high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, and some types of cancer.

The causes of obesity are not as clear because overeating is not always the reason. Genetics or hormonal imbalance may be factors.

So what can you do to treat obesity? First of all, evaluation of your diet is an important first step. To help you lose weight, your diet should provide fewer calories a day than your body needs to maintain your ideal weight. You can do this by limiting fat, especially saturated fat, in the diet. I usually tell my patients to avoid candy, chocolate, and sugared sodas.

Your diet should allow you to lose 1 to 2 pounds a week. Do not fast, follow fad diets, or take drugs that curb your appetite.

In fact, the most effective diet is not a diet at all, but a gradual change in eating and lifestyle habits that you can continue for the rest of your life.



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### BETTER HEALTH

Next, physical activity is a very important part of a successful weight loss. Always make sure that you get clearance from your physician before you begin an exercise regimen.

Once you reach a lower weight, exercise also helps you stay at that weight. You don't have to run a marathon. What I tell most of my patients is to walk a little bit every day. Then, as your exercise tolerance improves, gradually increase the duration of your walk.

Other acceptable forms of physical activity include cycling and step aerobics. Almost any activity that involves mild to moderate exertion is good, even gardening.

Regular exercise also increases your metabolic rate, which means your body burns more calories, even as you sleep.

Even diet and exercise may not cause significant weight loss in some people. In this situation, medical therapy may be appropriate if the patient

also has an obesity-related condition such as arthritis or heart disease.

Currently there are only two federally approved medications for treatment of obesity: Meridia reduces appetite; Xenical prevents absorption of fat from the intestine.

However, these drugs are usually reserved for people who have failed a course of diet and exercise after six months. Even after a patient is started on one of these medications, most doctors still recommend continued dieting and exercising.

Keep in mind though that losing weight may be easy to do at first. The actual problem comes when obese people try to keep the weight off. Often this is caused by emotional problems that contributed to the obesity in the first place.

If you are already under stress, your health care provider may decide that you should not try to lose weight until your life becomes more stable. Remember, gaining excess weight occurs over a long period. Losing that weight requires motivation and discipline. To maintain a healthy weight you must eat healthy foods and develop the habit of being physically active.

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