

# Safe way to shed some pounds

Losing weight is not easy but if you take baby steps now, you'll reap the benefits in the long run.

By Assoc Prof Dr CHIN YIT SIEW & Dr ZAWIAH HASHIM

SHOULD you lose body weight?

The answer is "Yes" if you are overweight or obese.

Overweight and obesity refer to a person's excess body fat. By maintaining a healthy body weight, you will look and feel good without placing your health at risk. Many chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes, list overweight and obesity as risk factors.

Thus, if you are currently overweight or obese, your best bet is to shed your excess weight, but you have to do it safely.

While losing weight can make a healthier you, problems may arise when it is done incorrectly.

The desire to lose weight quickly has led many people to turn to fad diets, which promise a quick fix if you adhere to rigid rules that focus purely on weight loss. They also generally promote a specific food, food groups or a combination (e.g. eating only nuts or berries, meat or fish) and may even claim that these foods alter your body's biochemistry, making it burn your body fat.

Although you may lose weight quickly when you're on a fad diet, it is usually not sustainable as you will regain the weight or end up weighing even more. Worse still, some fad diets may have harmful side effects. Hence, the effective and safe way to lose weight is to focus on practising a healthy lifestyle that incorporates eating healthily and being active regularly.

## Strike a balance

A simple concept to maintain a healthy weight is that of energy balance.

In essence, the energy "in" (calories from food consumed) should ideally be balanced with energy "out" (calories used by your body and any physical activity).

If the energy balance is negative i.e. more calories are going out than coming in, then a normal weight person may become underweight.

If the energy balance is positive i.e. more calories coming in than going out, then a person may become overweight or obese.

To lose weight, you'll need to reduce your daily calorie intake from food, and increase your daily energy expenditure through physical activities. It is also important to set a goal of how much weight to lose.

It is best to target losing five to 10% of your body weight over six months, or 0.5kg to 1kg per week.

Aim for steady weight loss over a longer period.

## Healthy diet for weight loss

Your body requires energy and nutrients to function. Hence, you still need to practise balance, moderation and variety in planning your meals. Here's a sample of calories in popular foods:

- > 1 bowl curry noodle (670 kcal) or 34% of daily energy requirement (based on 2,000 kcal)
- > 1 plate fried kueh-teow (670 kcal) or 34%
- > 1 bowl assam laksa (470 kcal) or 24%
- > 3 pieces of banana fritters (goreng pisang) (390 kcal) or 20%
- > 1 bowl kueh-teow soup (360 kcal) or 18%
- > 1 piece of fried chicken (260 kcal) or 13%
- > 2 pieces of karipap (260 kcal) or 13%
- > 1 can sugar-sweetened drink (137 kcal) or 7%
- > 1 mug teh O (60 kcal) or 3%



By playing badminton for an hour, you can lose around 320 kcal. — AP

> 1 glass plain water (0 kcal) or 0%

To lose weight, aim at reducing your intake by 250 kcal (approximately the calorie contained in one piece of fried chicken) per day.

Try having at least three main meals a day, but reduce the portion size and choose foods with lower calories.

From the sample above, you will notice that certain foods have very high calories.

For example, consuming one serving of curry noodle and one can of sugary drink for lunch would contribute to about 40% of the daily energy needs of an adult. You should opt for a lower calorie combination, e.g. kueh-teow soup and plain water, which provide only half the amount of calorie compared with the previous combination.

If you are hungry between meals, try to limit additional food intake to a maximum of two snacks a day.

Avoid deep fried foods, sugary drinks and desserts, and opt for healthy snacks such as yoghurt, wholegrain crackers, and fruits.

Do consider eating fibre-rich foods as they will help you feel full.



These goreng pisang make a delicious snack but it takes two hours of cycling to burn off three pieces of it! — Filepic

Avoid having late dinners or eating supper just before bedtime as the energy from this meal will be stored as fat during sleep.

## Exercise and be physically active

Exercise is extremely important for losing weight. The frequency, intensity, type of activity and duration will affect how many calories you burn. Below are the approximate amount of calories burned from various activities:

- > Swim for 1 hour 15 minutes (530 kcal)
  - > Jog for 1 hour 15 minutes (440 kcal)
  - > Cycle for 2 hours (390 kcal)
  - > Play badminton for 1 hour (320 kcal)
  - > Brisk walk for 1 hour and 15 minutes (300 kcal)
  - > Dance for 45 minutes (260 kcal)
  - > Sweep the floor for 30 minutes (70 kcal)
- As per the energy balance concept, if you take three pieces of banana fritters, you will need to cycle for two hours to burn off the calories!

Hence, you should be mindful when it comes to balancing your energy intake against your energy expenditure.

Aim to burn an additional of 250 kcal or more from physical activities daily to lose weight such as brisk walking for an hour.

Make a schedule for exercise and find some activities that will fit into your lifestyle. You may opt for indoor exercises (e.g. aerobics/yoga) or take up sports (e.g. futsal, swimming, etc.) with family or friends.

Start with baby steps and gradually increase the intensity of your exercise to 60-90 minutes per day.

Walking is a simple yet excellent way to increase your physical activity level. Aim for 10,000 steps daily and keep track of your progress with a pedometer.

If you consistently fall short of this target, make an extra effort by going for daily walks.

## Long term health benefits

Following a healthy, low-calorie diet that is combined with exercise, will likely ensure that your weight goes down.

Remember not to give up too early!

If you revert to your old eating habits, or go back to a sedentary lifestyle, this would lead to regaining the weight you lost.

A conscious effort is needed in order to achieve a healthy weight for long term health benefits.

It may be difficult in the beginning but once you get into the habit of healthy eating and active living, you will find it very rewarding.

This article is contributed by Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2019, an annual community nutrition education initiative jointly organised by Nutrition Society of Malaysia, the Malaysian Dietitians' Association and the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity. NMM will be organising a Food-Fit-Fun Fair at IOI City Mall, Putrajaya, from April 17-21. Visit [www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my](http://www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my) or NMM Facebook page for more information.



If you've excess body fat, it's time to do something about it.