

# HEALTHY WEIGHT MANAGEMENT



## Is the BMI accurate?

Medical research tells us that too much body fat, especially central or internal visceral body fat increases risks of disease.

The Body Mass Index (BMI) measurement can help doctors screen and identify overweight or obese individuals at risk.

- **Body Mass Index (BMI)** – this is calculated by dividing your weight (kg) by the square of your height (m). A BMI between 18.5 to 24.9 is in the healthy range, 25-29.9 is overweight and > 30 is considered obese. These ranges only apply to Caucasians but not to Asians who have lower targets.

However the BMI assumes that everyone has a similar body composition. Situations where the BMI may be inaccurate include those who are heavy but have a lower internal fat mass eg bodybuilders and pregnant women, and those who are of normal weight but have a higher body fat composition e.g. sedentary individuals with low muscle mass such as the elderly.

Presently a more useful indicator is the waist circumference which better reflects central body fat and obesity.

- **Waist circumference** – the ideal waist or healthy waist circumference for women, is under 88.9cm (35 inches) and for men under 101.5cm (40 inches).

## What causes an unhealthy body composition?

- We are eating more
- We are more sedentary
- We are eating more foods that are calorie rich but lack many nutrients

Other reasons for weight gain and obesity include medications (eg steroids, and some anti-depressants), medical conditions like an inactive thyroid.

## Why lose weight and body fat?

The main reason for weight control is for health not appearance. Common associated health risks include diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, fatty liver, coronary artery disease, stroke, sleep apnea, osteoarthritis, cancers (colon, gallbladder, kidney, breast, uterine and prostate), gallstones, fertility and pregnancy problems and social/ emotional issues. Just a 5- 10% weight loss can bring about health improvements

## What is healthy weight management?

Healthy weight management today focuses on not just losing body weight but improving body composition by reducing body fat and also increasing muscle mass. This is done through behavioural

modification of improved diets and increased physical activity. Some people may benefit from prescription medications or weight loss (bariatric) surgery.

### **Dietary Changes**

Crash diets are not useful as they often cut out too many calories and nutrients leading to other health problems. Although they may often give fast weight loss initially, the process of severe calorie restrictions not only results in water and fat loss, but they also cause vital muscle loss.

A better way is to manage portion sizes and choose fresh nutrient-rich and calorie-sparse foods like vegetables, fruits and whole grains.

### **Increased Physical Activity**

The goal of exercise for weight loss is to burn more calories. One of the best ways is steady aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, for more than 30mins daily. In addition some simple resistance or weight training is useful in building and preserving muscle mass. If you are obese, unfit or have other health problems, please check with your doctor before starting an exercise programme.

### **Behaviour Modification**

For long term health, a sustainable healthy weight and body composition is important. Beyond diet and exercise, it also involves developing an effective mind set and approach to making healthy lifestyle choices which should also include alcohol and smoking. A behaviour modification programme by a trained professional can help you make these lifestyle changes and achieve sustainable healthy habits

### **Prescription Weight Loss Medications**

Medications are usually considered after lifestyle approaches have not worked, or when the BMI >27 with associated medical conditions like diabetes, hypertension or sleep apnea, or when the BMI > 30.

Medications work by either suppressing appetite or preventing absorption of fat in the intestines. They are useful in kick-starting a weight loss programme. However weight loss is moderate at best and not sustainable.

### **Weight loss (Bariatric) Surgery**

When BMI > 40, or lower in the presence of serious weight-related health problems, this can be managed by a surgeon specialising in gastric banding or intra-gastric balloon procedures.

Please discuss medical and surgical options with your doctors when behaviour modifications of diet and exercise do not work for you.