

Summary sheet 13

Losing weight, and maintaining a healthy weight

What are the health risks of being overweight?

Being overweight increases your risk of developing coronary heart disease, and other health conditions, such as diabetes, some cancers and arthritis.

Your body weight is a result of the balance between the food and drink you consume (calories) and the energy your body uses up through its day-to-day activity.

Keeping to a healthy weight and body shape will help you control your blood pressure and cholesterol levels. It will also reduce your risk of developing diabetes.

How can you find out if you need to lose weight?

What does your body shape tell you?

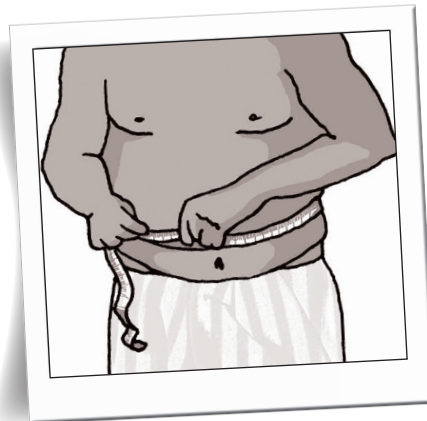
People who carry too much weight around their middle (abdomen) have a greater risk of developing coronary heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.

People with most of their fat around their hips could still be at risk but tend to have a lower risk of developing these diseases.

The easiest way to find out if you need to lose weight is to measure your waist with a tape measure:

How to measure your waist:

1. Find the top of your hip bone and the bottom of your ribs.
2. Breathe out naturally.
3. Place the tape measure mid-way between these points and wrap it around your body.
4. Make a note of your waist measurement and check it with the chart below



	Your health is at risk if you have a waist size of:	Your health is at high risk if you have a waist size of:
Men	Over 94cm (about 37")	Over 102cm (about 40")
Women	Over 80cm (about 31.5")	Over 88cm (about 34.5")
South Asian men *		Over 90cm (about 35.5")
South Asian women *		Over 80cm (about 31.5")

* South Asians in the UK are more likely to have a higher proportion of body fat to muscle than the rest of the population, and they also tend to carry this fat around their middle. So South Asians have a greater risk of developing problems such as coronary heart disease.

What about Body Mass Index (BMI)?

Body mass index measurement (BMI) relates your weight to your height. BMI is usually expressed as a range such as ideal weight, overweight or very overweight. BMI however should not be used in isolation to determine if someone is a healthy weight. It is important to look at body shape too.

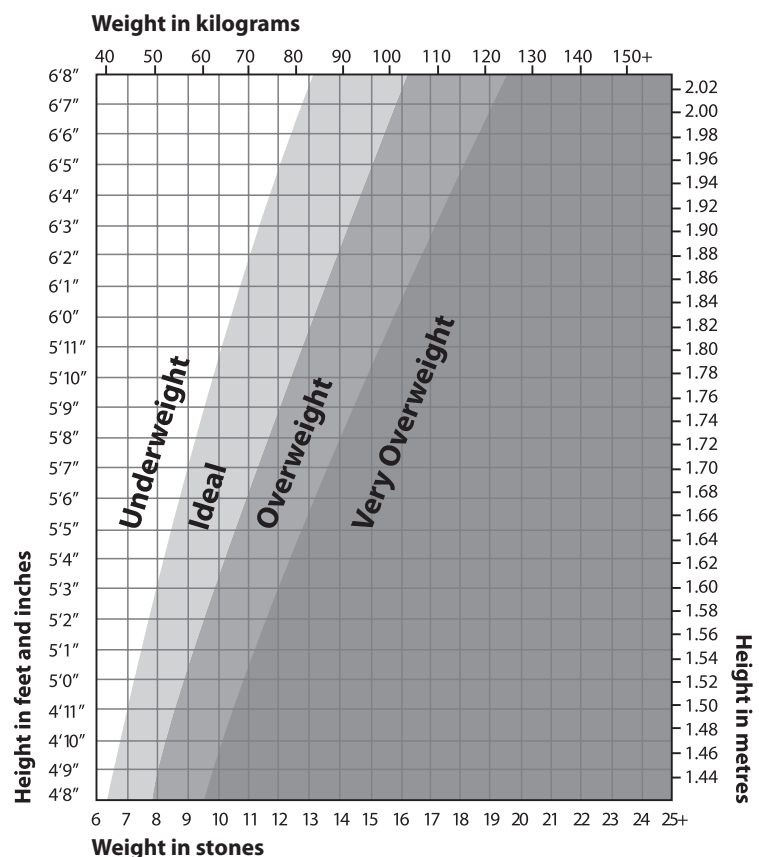
BMI and South Asians

For South Asians, BMI may not be a reliable measurement to help assess their coronary heart disease risk, as they are at higher risk at a lower BMI. This is because South Asians have a tendency to carry larger amounts of body fat around their middles (increasing the risk of high blood pressure and diabetes), and because body fat weighs less than muscle. So, for example, a South Asian may have the same BMI as a European, but their risk of developing coronary heart disease could be greater because their BMI is made up of more body fat than muscle¹.

This chart is a guide to finding out if you are a healthy weight for your heart. If you fall in the 'Overweight' or 'Very overweight' category on the chart, your health may be at risk.

Take a straight line up or down from your weight, and a line across from your height (without shoes). Put a mark where the two lines meet to find out if you are a healthy weight. This is only an approximate guide.

Adapted from a height/weight chart by kind permission of the Food Standards Agency



What can you do to lose weight?

If you eat a lot of fatty foods, sweet foods or sugary drinks, you're more likely to put on weight, because these foods are very high in calories. When you eat more calories than your body burns up, the extra calories are stored as fat, which will increase your weight. You are even more likely to put on weight if you are physically inactive.

If your weight or body shape means that your health is at risk or at high risk, it is important to make healthy lifestyle changes that will reduce or prevent any further increase in your waist size and weight. This will improve your health and reduce your risk of getting coronary heart disease.

To lose weight, you need to use up more energy (calories) than your body takes in from food and drink. You can do this by:

- eating and drinking fewer calories
- using up more calories by getting more active, or by
- combining the two.

Most people find that doing both achieves the best results. You may prefer to start off with changes to what you eat (see Summary sheets 12a and 12b) and think about exercise later. It's up to you.

Physical activity

For exercise to greatly reduce the risk of heart disease, you need to aim for 30 minutes of moderate activity at least five times a week. 'Moderate activity' leaves you warm and breathing more heavily, but you should still be able to hold a conversation. If this sounds impossible for you just now, remember that any increase in your physical activity is a step in the right direction and will certainly help. (For more information see Summary sheet 8)

If 30 minutes in one go sounds too much, build up to it by trying activity in shorter bouts. For example, 10 minutes at a time three times a day. And, vary your activities so that you don't get bored. Try to build them into your daily life – eg, instead of driving or taking the bus, walk for all or part of your journey.

If you need to lose weight, you may have to do more than 30 minutes a day to achieve your goal. But however much activity you're doing, it's important to warm up and cool down properly after each activity to prevent injury. You should also check with your doctor that it is safe for you to do the activity you have chosen before you start it. This is particularly important if you have a lot of weight to lose or you have other medical conditions.

How can you lose weight, and maintain an ideal weight

- **Eat meals regularly.** Plan your meals and don't skip breakfast – you'll be less likely to crave high-fat or sugary snacks.
- **Balance your meals.** Cut down on fat and sugar, eat more fruit and vegetables, and cut down on foods and drinks that are high in fat or sugar.
- **Watch your portion size.** Reduce your calorie intake by watching your portion sizes. Try eating smaller servings by using a smaller plate.
- **Get active.** By combining more physical activity with eating less food, you have a greater chance of losing weight. You'll be taking in less energy (calories), and using up more energy at the same time.
- **Plan realistic changes.** Make sure that the changes you plan to make are realistic, and that you can keep them up in the long term.

If you lose weight slowly and steadily, you're more likely to keep the weight off for good. People who follow a weight-loss programme that aims to lose a total of 5 to 10 kg (about 10 to 20 lb) – by losing between half a kilo and one kilo (about one to two pounds) a week – usually achieve their target². But losing even small amounts of weight can benefit your health.

Can being underweight cause problems?

It's also important not to be underweight, especially as we get older. Being underweight can affect your ability to fight infection and to recover from illness. It can also weaken your muscles, including your heart. Aim to be within a healthy weight range for your height and talk to your GP or practice nurse if you have noticed any unexpected weight loss.

If you have any questions about what or how much you should be eating, or how much physical activity you should be doing, ask your GP or call the BHF Heart HelpLine on **0300 330 3311** (local rate number).

For more information

bhf.org.uk

BHF services:

Heart Matters is a BHF service offering information and support on improving your heart health. Visit

bhf.org.uk/heartmatters

BHF Heart HelpLine: 0300 330 3311 (local rate number) – for information and support on anything related to heart health. This service is available in English only.

BHF booklets:

So you want to lose weight ... for good: A guide to losing weight for men and women (in English)

Taking control of your weight (in English)

Looking after your heart (aimed at South Asians, in English and five South Asian Languages)

To order these *free* resources, call the **BHF Orderline** on **0870 600 6566**

Other organisations:

Weightwise: www.bdaweightwise.com

1. International Diabetes Federations. 2005. The IDF Consensus Worldwide Definition of the Metabolic Syndrome. Brussels, Belgium: International Diabetes Federation.

2. Miller WC, Koceja DM, Hamilton EJ. 1997. A meta analysis of the past 25 years of weight loss research using diet, exercise or diet plus exercise intervention. *International Journal of Obesity*; 21: 941-47.