



### **A Realistic Look at Weight Control**

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Can anything be done about our nation's apparently losing battle with weight control?

Setting ideal weight targets for people may not be realistic, but subtle changes in either their calorie intake or activity level may hold the answer.

A report in the journal *Science* suggests that the average adult gain of two pounds a year corresponds to consuming 100 calories more each day than are burned up. So burning 100 calories more, or consuming 100 calories less, could halt this weight gain.

Many nutrition experts agree that making small changes that can be permanently maintained is an effective plan. But before we all jump on the "100 calories is all it takes" bandwagon, remember that this refers to stopping a two-pound-a-year gain. Those who have been gaining more than two pounds a year will need to cut back more. Also, cutting back by these amounts will stop the *yearly* gain, but will not necessarily bring someone back to a healthy weight after a gain of ten or twenty pounds. To lose weight at the recommended rate, cut back an additional 250 to 500 calories per day.

Since research suggests that drinks do nothing to satisfy hunger, start by looking at your beverage choices. Each standard-size alcoholic drink contains from 100 to 170 calories. Each 20-ounce bottle or "medium" fast food cup of regular soda contains about 250. Juice offers lots of nutrition, but that doesn't make excessive amounts of it healthful. If you drink more than one or two six-ounce glasses, omit eight excess ounces and save 100 or more calories. Then cut down on certain foods. Choose leaner meat or reduced-fat cheese, or skip fried foods, and you'll cut 50 to 100 calories more.

The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) recommends two strategies to decrease not only calorie consumption, but also cancer risk. First, your portions may be too large, so cut them back by a quarter or a half. Second, focus on eating the five to ten servings of fruits and vegetables daily that AICR recommends for good health and you'll satisfy your hunger with lower-calorie foods. That way, you can comfortably cut back on excessive portions of meat, pasta and potatoes, saving 200 or more calories.

It's possible to meet your target change in calorie balance entirely by cutting back on calories but if you're not already physically active, boost the number of calories you burn as part of the switch. Studies consistently find that people who lose weight – and keep it off – exercise regularly. For a 150-pound adult, 30 minutes of moderate walking, 20 minutes on a stationary bike, or just 15 minutes of swimming can burn 100 extra calories.

Some researchers recommend strength training as part of a strategy to prevent weight gain. Without it, we lose muscle tissue each year after middle age. Since muscle is the most calorie-burning tissue, every bit of muscle lost means even fewer calories needed.

Another report in *Science* notes that hormonal differences may change some people's sensitivity to caloric balance. In order to stop weight gain, they may need more than the 100-calorie deficit. A wide body of research suggests that for those who are very overweight, even a weight loss of 15 to 20 percent can offer significant health improvements. Experts emphasize that, rather than giving up weight loss because one cannot reach a specific weight, effort should be targeted to fitness as well as eating to promote overall health. Several studies show better health in those who are overweight but fit than in those whose weight is classified as "healthy," but whose lifestyles are not.

If you need help to improve your eating habits and prevent weight gain, *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*<sup>™</sup> can help. Contact your local base Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian for more information.