

Losing weight safely?

If you are overweight and want to lose some of the excess pounds, it's important to set yourself a realistic, achievable target. This article explains how you can lose weight safely and effectively.

Get active and eat less

The best way to lose weight is to increase your activity and eat smaller portions at each meal time. You are recommended to get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times a week to stay at a healthy weight. Choose activities that you enjoy and that are easy for you to include in your lifestyle. A few simple suggestions that can help build exercise into your daily life are as follows: Use stairs instead of taking lifts or escalators; Walk or cycle on short journeys - for example do the school run on foot instead of taking the car; Take a walk during your lunch break; Go for family walks or bike rides at weekends.

To help lose excess weight you must reduce the amount of calories you eat. Changing what you eat in order to lose weight doesn't necessarily mean eating less food, but it does mean choosing different types of food. Here are a few ideas which can help: Base your meals on starchy foods like bread, potatoes, rice or pasta; Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables; Use less butter, margarine and vegetable oils (olive oil is healthier for cooking); Choose low-fat varieties of dairy products, meat, fish and vegetarian alternatives; Replace snacks such as chocolate, cakes, biscuits and crisps with healthier alternatives; Boil, poach, grill, steam and microwave food instead of frying or roasting.

Improve your eating habits

As well as having a healthy menu it's important to have healthy eating habits. For example snacking in between meals can ruin efforts to lose weight. A few pointers are as follows: Eat regularly during the day; Ensure you have a good breakfast; Only eat when you are hungry; Eat slowly, chewing every mouthful thoroughly, and only eat until you are comfortably full; Don't feel guilty about leaving food on your plate; Try not to eat late in the evening - if you feel hungry late at night, choose fruit or a low-fat milky drink.

Set realistic goals

Decide on small, practical changes that you feel comfortable with, and include foods that you enjoy in your eating plan. Aim to lose no more than 0.5 to 1kg (1 to 2lb) in weight every week. There is no quick-fix answer to long-term weight loss. Don't be tempted to crash diet or use the latest fad or celebrity diet. The danger of these were discussed by me in last week's Topic, if you missed it or any of my articles, they are available at www.whelehans.ie or in the pharmacy. Weigh yourself once a week and plot a graph so that you can monitor your progress. Try not to focus on how much weight you have lost each week. Instead focus on how you feel and look for positive changes as a result of your new healthy diet, such as feeling more toned or having more energy.

When you first start to restrict your calories, you will lose weight quite rapidly. This will be mostly water and glycogen (a type of energy stored in your liver and muscles) as well as some fat. The rate of your weight loss will then slow down, but the proportion of the weight you lose that is accounted for by fat should increase.

How diet affects cholesterol level

Apart from your genes, the biggest cause of cholesterol is your diet. Cholesterol runs in families, so if one of your parents or a brother or sister have high cholesterol, you will be at increased of developing high cholesterol. However, there are a number of preventable risk factors which increase your risk of cholesterol. These include:

1. **Unhealthy diet** - some foods contain cholesterol (known as dietary cholesterol) for example, liver, kidneys and eggs. However, dietary cholesterol has little effect on blood cholesterol. More important is the amount of saturated fat in your diet. Foods that are high in saturated fat include, red meat, meat pies, sausages, hard cheese, butter and lard, pastry, cakes and biscuits, and cream, such as soured cream and crème fraîche,
2. **Lack of exercise or physical activity** - can increase your level of bad cholesterol (LDL), and decrease your level of good cholesterol (HDL),
3. **Obesity** - if you are overweight you are likely to have an increased level of LDL and a decreased level of HDL, increasing your overall blood cholesterol level.

Evidence strongly indicates that high cholesterol levels can cause narrowing of the arteries (atherosclerosis), heart attacks, and strokes. The risk of coronary heart disease also rises as blood cholesterol levels increase. If other risk factors, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and smoking, are present, the risk increases even more.

Free Heart Screening

If you are worried that you or a loved one are at increased risk of heart disease, you can book in for a free checkup on our heart screening day. The check-up takes about half an hour. Our pharmacist will check your blood pressure and cholesterol and our diabetic nurse will test you for diabetes. We can also calculate your Body Mass Index if you so wish. We will calculate your risk of heart disease. If you already suffer from high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes or a heart condition, you can book in on the day to get your condition assessed or to ask questions about your condition or your medication regime. Our heart screening days take place once a month. Call us at 04493 34591 to book your place.

A little extra help

If you need a little extra help losing weight, Whelehans now have a free weight loss clinic where you get free and comprehensive support and information to help you lose weight. You can get weighed on a weekly basis and we calculate your body mass index. Call in to our store or call us on 04493 34591 for more information.

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans, log on to www.whelehans.ie or dial 04493 34591. You can find us on Facebook. You can also e-mail queries to info@whelehans.ie.