

Must Know Health Info

Health Information from the Experts at Johns Hopkins Medicine



Losing Weight When You Have Diabetes

The only proven way is a change in lifestyle. Put healthy limits on the calories you eat; get more exercise.

Extra weight is a problem if you have diabetes. People with type 1 can gain weight with some types of insulin treatment (called “intensive insulin therapy”). A large number of those who have type 2 are overweight or obese. Extra weight makes you more likely to get diabetes in the first place. And, if you have diabetes, extra weight makes you more likely to get:

- Coronary heart disease
- High blood pressure.

So, weight loss has huge health benefits.

If you have type 2, losing weight also has benefits. Losing just 5 percent of your weight can improve your blood sugar. Weight loss can also:

- Help your body use its own insulin better
- Reduce your need for medicine to treat your diabetes
- Improve your cholesterol
- Reduce your risk for heart disease
- Lower your blood pressure.

But, losing weight and keeping it off is difficult. So, what is the best way to lose weight safely and effectively? How do you do it when you have diabetes?

Special concerns for people with diabetes

If you are trying to lose weight, there is a way that is most effective: reduce your calories; get more exercise. This is true if you have diabetes or not. But, diet is a key part of blood sugar control. So, those with diabetes must be sure to get the calories they need. Here is the goal. Stick with nutrient advice for diabetes while you are doing weight loss. And, space carbs (carbohydrates) out evenly over the day.

The ADA says, in order to lose weight, cut back on how much fat you eat. This will help to lower how many calories you take in. Plus, when you eat less fat, it helps to lower your cholesterol. A study looked at diets for weight loss in people with type 2. It looked at how well 3 low-calorie diets worked. One diet was high in carbs; one was high in good fat (monounsaturated); and one was high in bad fat (saturated). All 3 diets led to equal weight loss; they also all led to better blood sugar; and sensitivity to insulin. But the diets that were high in carbs and good fats had another benefit. Those 2 led to lower bad (LDL) cholesterol; the diet high in bad fat did not.

If you gain weight while you are on insulin, you can't just stop using it. You should stick to a diet that works for weight loss in diabetes. Taking insulin with metformin (Glucophage®) may help to lower weight gain in those with type 2. In one study, those taking insulin with metformin did not gain any weight; those taking insulin alone or with a sulfonylurea did gain weight.

If you are ready to start a weight loss program, talk to your doctor. He or she can suggest optimal meal plans. Your doctor may have you see a dietician. This will help you get more detailed directions and help. When you change your lifestyle and lose weight, you may have other changes. You may need to make changes in how much medicine you take or when you take it. And, you will need to make adjustments for exercise.

What about weight-loss drugs?

Two popular diet drugs can help people lose weight. See the table.

Name	Considerations
Orlistat (Xenical®)	This is now available as Alli® without a prescription. Moderately effective for weight loss. Unpleasant gastrointestinal side effects such as gas and oily anal leakage.
Sibutramine (Meridia®)	Available by prescription. Somewhat more effective than Orlistat. Does not have the gastrointestinal side effects.

These drugs may help people who have had a lot of trouble losing weight. A study of people on pills (sulfonylureas) to treat their diabetes showed this. Everyone who took part in the study was obese. Orlistat led to slightly more weight loss than diet alone.

Starting and maintaining your weight loss program

There are a lot of popular diets and gimmicks for weight loss. But, the only sure fire way to lose weight and keep it off is to change your lifestyle; eat healthy and exercise. Watch your carb intake to keep blood sugar in control. Here are more tips to help you make such changes.

- **Set goals that are realistic.** Don't focus on trying to lose a specific number of pounds. Make it your goal to follow a healthier diet and to get more exercise. The safest rate of weight loss is ½ pound to 2 pounds a week.
- **Seek support from family and friends.** Your loved ones can give both moral support and hands-on help. Here is an example. They can make healthy meals; they can also not bring high-calorie snacks into the house.
- **Make your changes slowly but surely.** Don't try to make too many changes too quickly. That may overwhelm you. Instead, go step by step. For example, if you drink whole milk, switch first to 2 percent milk; then go to 1 percent, and then to skim.
- **Eat slowly.** It takes the brain about 20 minutes to know the stomach is full. So, eating slowly helps you feel satisfied on less food.

- **Eat three meals a day.** Do not skip meals or severely restrict food intake. Be sure to stay away from an eat all-or- eat nothing approach. That can be dangerous. You are more likely to overeat; plus it affects your blood sugars.
- **Record your progress and do not forget your success.** Keep a food diary to record your progress. It can help you see your progress and help you stay motivated. Keep in mind your past successes. This can help you feel more confident and make the changes that will lead to weight loss.
- **Take a look at your relationship to food.** People often eat when they are not hungry. Some feelings or behaviors can act as cues to eat. Habit, stress; feeling bored, sad, or happy; or using food as a reward can trigger you to want to eat. Figure out your cues. Replace them with other things you enjoy. That way you can cut out some extra calories.
- **Don't try to be perfect.** You do have to change your eating patterns. But, you can still eat a high fat food every now and then. Just be sure not to go all the way off your diet.

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*****Authored by Johns Hopkins University and Johns Hopkins Health System*****