



# Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

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## The Healthy Journey

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### Let's Talk About Obesity

#### Obesity Facts

Someone is obese when they weigh more than what is considered healthy. Obesity is a chronic disease. It requires long term intervention. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), obesity affects 4 in 10 adults. Severe obesity affects 1 in 10 adults. These rates are expected to rise by 2030.

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for overall health. Obesity is a risk for poor health and chronic diseases such as:

- High blood pressure & high cholesterol
- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease & stroke
- Osteoarthritis
- Sleep apnea
- Cancers (breast, colon, kidney, gallbladder, and liver)
- Chronic pain and inflammation
- Early death

Reducing stress and improving sleep quality can help with weight management. Increasing physical activity also helps manage weight. Genetics, family history, race, ethnicity, education, income, and environmental factors contribute to obesity. According to the CDC, obesity rates are 44% among adults ages 40-59, and 42% among adults who are 60 and older. Obesity rates are 50% for Black adults and 41% for White adults. To learn more about these differences, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>.

#### What is BMI?

BMI stands for Body Mass Index. It measures body fat based on height and weight. There are 4 BMI categories:

- Underweight (<18.5)
- Healthy weight (18.5-24.9)
- Overweight (25.0-29.9)
- Obese (>30)

BMI is a screening tool used to identify obesity. Medical providers also consider factors like sex, percent body fat, and age.

If two people have the same BMI, their percentage of body fat may differ. For example, a muscular person with an elevated BMI may not be considered obese. To learn more about BMI in adults, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/index.html>.



Obesity is a risk for poor health and chronic diseases

#### Obesity and HANDLS

HANDLS studies health in Baltimore communities. We started our study in 2004 by inviting African American and White adults living in Baltimore to participate in a long-term study about their health. Differences in age, sex, race, and socioeconomic status affect health outcomes. We call these differences health disparities.

In wave 4, about 12% of women and men were overweight regardless of race. By contrast, about 33% of women were obese, and about 14% of African American men and 18% of White men were obese.

#### Body appreciation

Obesity is a disease and not a personal failing. Society gives us messages about body image. Sometimes, these messages make us feel like we are not enough. You are a valuable person. Your body deserves kindness and respect. Take a moment to notice things you appreciate about your body.

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**Exercise:** Reflect on the amazing things your body can do. For example, your body may have recovered from an injury or surgery. Your body may tell you when it is time to rest. Your body may allow you to pursue a hobby, such as dancing, singing, or gardening. Your body may allow you to experience senses such as taste, smell, sight, touch, and sound. What do you appreciate about your body?

Practicing body appreciation may lead to improved self-esteem and self-respect. Affirmations for body appreciation include:

- I appreciate the things my body can do.
- I strive for progress, not perfection.
- I nourish my body through movement, healthy food, rest, and self-care.
- Bodies come in all shapes and sizes.
- My appearance does not define my worth.
- My health is a priority.



### Diets vs. nutrition

Ask your medical provider for tips on healthy eating. Food gives your body the energy it needs to survive and thrive. Healthy eating supports your overall health.

We know that extra weight is not good for our bodies. Nevertheless, we are drawn to unhealthy food at times. Foods like candy, fast food, and soda have lots of calories but few nutrients. This means that some foods do not give us the vitamins and minerals needed to help our bodies function well. Regularly eating these types of foods may cause increases in weight.

Fad diets can make false promises about weight loss. Diets that are low in calories or restrict entire food groups are not healthy. These diets are also difficult to keep up. Talk to your provider before beginning a new diet or eating plan. Your provider will tell you if a diet or eating plan is appropriate for your body's needs.

### Treatment

There are many ways to manage obesity. These include lifestyle changes, medication, and surgery. Talk to your medical provider about which treatment is right for you.

Lifestyle changes are the first line of treatment for obesity. They include:

- Cutting down on foods high in calories but low in nutrients
- Eating lean protein, fruits, and vegetables
- Increasing physical activity
- Practicing stress management
- Improving sleep quality
- Participating in weight loss programs, support groups, or therapy

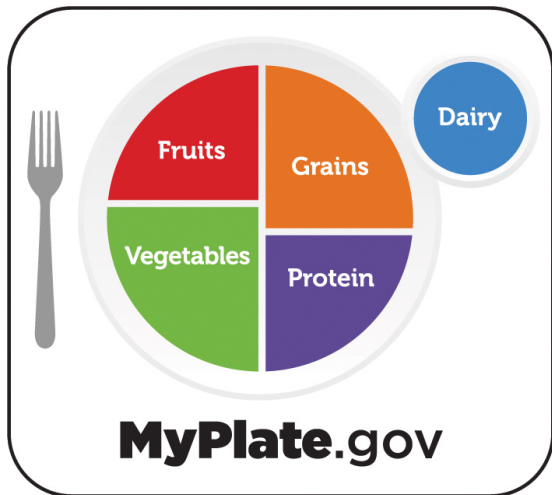
Lifestyle changes are the best ways to manage weight. If they are not enough, your provider might suggest medication. Medications do not replace lifestyle changes. Some medications work by making it harder for your body to absorb fat from food. Others work by helping you feel less hungry. Ask your medical provider about medications that are FDA-approved.

Currently, medications for obesity include orlistat (Xenical), phentermine-topiramate (Qsymia), naltrexone-bupropion (Contrave), liraglutide (Saxenda), and semaglutide (Ozempic and Wegovy). Medications may have side effects. Your provider can tell you if these medications are right for you. To learn more about these medications, visit <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/prescription-medications-treat-overweight-obesity>.

Weight loss surgeries make changes to your digestive system. People who can't lose weight by other methods may be candidates for surgery. 3 common types of surgery are gastric sleeve, gastric bypass, and adjustable gastric band. To learn more about these surgeries, visit <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/bariatric-surgery/types>.

Weight loss surgery may help you lose weight but you will regain weight after surgery if you return to unhealthy habits. It is important to follow your provider's tips for maintaining a healthy weight after surgery. Ask your provider if surgery is right for you. To learn more about weight loss surgery, visit <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/bariatric-surgery>.

Weight loss surgery can be expensive. The cost varies based on your medical insurance provider. You may also need approval from your insurance plan before you can have surgery. Contact your insurance company to learn more about weight loss surgery coverage or requirements. If you do not have health insurance, visit <https://www.marylandhealthconnection.gov/> or call 1-855-642-8572 to enroll.



## MyPlate

MyPlate helps Americans create healthy eating habits. MyPlate recommends eating a variety of healthy foods. They share the following tips:

- Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Choose whole grain versions of common foods like bread and pasta.
- Eat a variety of protein such as beans, seafood, lean meats, poultry, and unsalted nuts.
- Choose low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) dairy products.
- Choose foods and drinks with less added sugar, saturated fat, and sodium.

MyPlate recommends these daily targets, based on a 2,000-calorie plan:

- 2 cups of whole fruits
- 2 ½ cups of vegetables
- 6 ounces of grains (¾ cup)
- 5 ½ ounces of protein (⅔ cup)
- 3 cups of dairy
- Limit added sugars to <4 tablespoons
- Limit saturated fat to <2½ tablespoons
- Limit sodium to <1 teaspoon

Visit <https://www.myplate.gov/> to learn more about MyPlate and access free resources.

## Physical Activity

Exercise can prevent many health problems related to aging. Staying active can help you reach a healthy weight. It also helps you manage stress! Talk to your medical provider before beginning an exercise routine. It is important to choose activities that are safe. Your provider can suggest activities that help you avoid pain, injury, or falls.

Three types of physical activity are:

**Flexibility:** Flexibility exercises include stretching and yoga. This type of exercise can ease the movements of your joints such as your elbows, wrists, and knees. This allows you to keep doing everyday routines and activities as you age.

**Strength:** Strength exercises include working with resistance bands and lifting weights. If you do not have weights, you can lift water bottles or canned goods instead. Strength training improves muscle mass, which helps balance and prevents falls. Strength exercises improve your ability to bend, walk, and maintain your balance and may prevent you from relying on a walker or cane in the future.

**Aerobic:** Walking and dancing are examples of aerobic exercises. Aerobic exercise increases your heart rate and oxygen intake. As this happens, increased blood circulation in your body brings nutrients to your organs.

## Tracking Tools

The CDC created templates to help you track a healthy lifestyle:

- Physical Activity Diary: [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/pdf/physical\\_activity\\_diary\\_cdc.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/pdf/physical_activity_diary_cdc.pdf)
- Food Diary: [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/pdf/food\\_diary\\_cdc.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/pdf/food_diary_cdc.pdf)

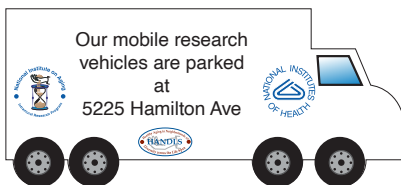
## Contacting HANDLS

If you'd like to be added to the HANDLS email list, please message us at [handls@mail.nih.gov](mailto:handls@mail.nih.gov).

## Reader suggestions

We want to hear from you! Are there any health-related topics you'd like to learn more about? Email HANDLS at [handls@mail.nih.gov](mailto:handls@mail.nih.gov) or text 443-431-0909 with suggestions for future topics!

*HANDLS*  
*National Institute on Aging*  
*Biomedical Research Center*  
*251 Bayview Blvd*  
*Baltimore MD 21224-2816*



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## **Newsletter for the HANDLS community**

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the influences of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. Our goal is to gather information to improve health and prevent disabilities for people of all backgrounds, particularly in minority communities and communities with limited resources.

**For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.**