



Choosing a Weight Loss Program

Only a fraction of attempts to lose weight are successful. Diets, weight loss programs and other forms of support such as nutritional or medical counseling can help if you haven't met your weight loss goals on your own. Here are some things to think about when choosing a weight loss program or diet.

Research findings related to weight loss to consider in choosing a program:

- A. People who have successfully lost weight and maintained their weight loss for a year or more are likely to keep food records, exercise several times a week or daily, and weigh themselves regularly.
- B. Participating in commercial weight loss programs that provide regular weighing, advice about diet and physical activity, motivation, and group support (such as Weight Watchers) is more effective for weight loss than standard medical care (consisting of weight loss advice from a primary care professional following established guidelines for obesity treatment.)
- C. If participants feel that the dietary rules they have to follow are too complex, they are more likely to drop out of a weight loss program.
- D. A low-fat diet with some meals replaced by prepared diet meals was found to be associated with significant weight loss, compared with other lifestyle interventions.
- E. Low-carbohydrate diets and low-fat, low-calorie diets both appear to be successful for weight loss in the short term, and both are nutritionally adequate. There may be an association between a person's genetic profile and success on one or the other regimen.
- F. In general, nutritionists recommend slow weight loss over time (1 to 2 pounds per week).
- G. A weight loss of 7 to 10% of body weight can have a significant effect on health.

How well does the diet follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans?

The guidelines summarized below from the US Department of Agriculture are based on expert review of research findings and are updated every five years.

- make half your plate vegetables and fruits
- make half your grains whole grains
- switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) dairy products
- choose lower sodium foods such as breads, soups, and frozen meals
- drink water instead of sugar-sweetened drinks
- balance calories (enjoy your food but eat less, avoid over-size portions)
- see complete guidelines at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/dietaryguidelines.htm>

How well does the program fit with the 2008 US Physical Activity guidelines?

The US Department of Health and Human Services released the guidelines summarized below, based on extensive expert review of research findings about physical activity and health.

- 150 minutes or more per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity
- muscle-strengthening activity for all major muscle groups 2 or more days per week
- see complete guidelines at <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/default.aspx>





Here are some other things to consider when you look at weight loss programs:

1. What you eat:

- How much of a change from your typical diet does the program require?
- Are any food groups excluded?
- How suitable is the program for special needs and preferences such as vegetarian or vegan, kosher, halal, gluten-free, etc?
- Do you prepare all the meals or purchase meal replacements for some meals?
- Is the plan flexible for eating out, special occasions, etc?
- Is the food that you eat and the amount that you eat likely to be satisfying to you or will you usually be hungry?

2. What is involved in following the diet:

- Are there special meals to purchase?
- Do you count calories or make other calculations?
- Do you keep records?
- What is the time commitment on a daily and weekly basis?

3. What support is available:

- Are there meetings, online or phone support available?

4. What is the role of exercise:

- Is exercise recommended to achieve weight loss?
- Is the recommended balance between food intake and exercise a good one for you?

5. What is the cost:

- Do you purchase a membership and/or pay fees to attend meetings?
- Do you pay for online services or access to certain content or tools?
- Do you need to purchase books, videos or equipment?
- Do you purchase premade meals as a part of the program?
- If you are preparing meals, are the foods on the program expensive?

6. How successful are people using the program:

- What is the rate of weight loss?
- Are there published randomized controlled trials reporting short-term and long-term weight loss and drop-out rates?