

Is Losing Weight and Increasing Physical Activity Really Important?

Long term studies of thousands of men and women since 1949 have produced a consistent finding — overweight Americans have more heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and certain types of cancer. Being inactive, having too much fat in the abdominal area, and having a family history of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer all seem to add to the risks associated with obesity.

Yes, the health risks of being overweight are well documented. Many people are told every year by their health professionals to lose weight. Few people actually lose weight and even fewer maintain their weight loss. Is losing and gaining more dangerous than just staying obese? Does one's ability to burn calories just get slower and slower with each try? Is trying one more time worth the trouble?

First, losing excess weight improves health. Even a loss of 10 pounds can lower blood pressure and blood sugar levels. A 12 year long study of 43,457 women determined that women with obesity related diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and cancer had a 20% reduced death rate when they intentionally lost weight. This reduction in death rate was mostly due to a 40 to 50% decrease in obesity related cancers such as those of the breast, uterus, and cervix, as well as a 30 to 40% decrease in diabetes-related death.

Second, repeated attempts do not permanently change one's metabolism, making weight loss harder each time. Metabolism is the amount of energy your body uses to maintain its functions. Metabolism does go down with age, so a person who is 50 years old needs less calories than a 20 year old. In addition to lowering the number of calories eaten each day, another way to maintain weight is to increase your amount of muscle with increased physical activities like walking and weight training. Muscles use more energy than fat. Engaging in an activity like brisk walking for 30 to 45 minutes also boosts metabolism.

So, is trying one more time worth the trouble? The answer is clearly yes. If you are not ready yet, at least try not to gain any more weight. If you want to have company losing weight and/or increasing your activity level, call your county Extension agent, _____, at _____ and sign up for Walk Across Texas. We have added a weight loss program this year for those of you wanting to start losing weight. You can choose to either come to classes or receive our letter series with information about a different weight loss tip each week.